THE CHRISTIAN ETHICS
of
NORMAN THOMAS, SOCIALIST

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Abstract

As a case study in Christian ethics, this thesis is an investigation of Norman Thomas' Christian social ethics, its background, its explicit presentation, and its continuing importance after Thomas abandoned other aspects of Christianity. The study focuses primarily on the values and ethical principles expressed in Thomas' social philosophy, during his years as Presbyterian minister and later as Socialist Party leader.

This examination of his social thought is preceded by a consideration of the social ethics of the Protestant Social Gospel tradition and the entire study concludes with reflections on Thomas' place in the history of Christian social ethics.

The study makes it abundantly clear that Norman Thomas, as a Christian minister, was part of the Protestant Social Gospel tradition that sought to establish the Kingdom of God on earth in America and that, by the twentieth century, had come to see that the Kingdom as
characterized by peace, socialism, and individual freedom. Even more important, the analysis of Thomas' later social philosophy reveals that he continued throughout his later life to adhere to the same social goals and ethical principles that had been at the heart of his understanding of Christianity. With the rejection of his earlier notion of a God who intervenes on the side of right, Thomas was no longer so able to take absolute stands, but the entire approach of his political work remained ethical and the values were the very same ones that had characterized his Christian days. While it has been widely thought that Thomas' mature social philosophy reflected some of his earlier Christian attitudes, the complete nature of the role of Christian ethical principles in his socialism has not been examined prior to this thesis.

Norman Thomas' social ethics was considerably closer in character to the social ethics of perennial Christian theology (for example, Thomas Aquinas) than to that of orthodox Protestantism. This is the conclusion reached in relating Thomas' thought to other forms
of Christian social ethics; it may shed some light on the likelihood of persons from particular traditions finding Thomas' socialism compatible with their theological views.
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# Table of Contents

## Introduction
1. Purpose 1
2. Method and Sources 1

## I. The Protestant Social Gospel
1. Introduction 6
2. Revivalism and Benevolence 8
3. The Social Gospel 23
4. The Social Gospel and Thomas 50

## II. Thomas: The Christian Socialist
1. Introduction 55
2. Pacifism 57
3. Civil Libertarianism 76
4. Socialism 85
5. Christianity and Radical Politics 104

## III. Thomas—Socialist Party Leader 113
1. Introduction 113
2. Thomas and Christianity 115
3. Peace and War 122
4. Freedom and Dissent 162
5. Socialism 177

## IV. Thomas and Christian Social Ethics 218
1. Introduction 218
2. Thomas' Christian Social Ethics 220

## Bibliography
1. Works by Norman Thomas
   - Books 242
   - Pamphlets 243
Articles  
Unpublished Papers  
2. Additional Bibliography
INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose

It is well known that the relationship between ethical convictions and social philosophy in the life of Normán Thomas was an intimate one. Thomas' mature social philosophy retained many of the ethical concerns that had characterized his work in the Presbyterian ministry. Yet, the nature of Thomas' Christian ethics and the influence of his religious ethics on his social philosophy have not been probed in detail. It is the purpose of this thesis to attempt to fill that gap, to examine carefully the Christian ethics of Normán Thomas.

An important dimension of the study of religion is the attempt to understand the influence of particular religious ideas on secular movements and social philosophy. This thesis is a study of the influence of religious convictions in the thought of one man after the explicit religious framework has been rejected. Normán Thomas was selected as subject of this study largely because he abandoned Christianity in the middle of his life.
During the period of his greatest activity in politics, he no longer considered himself a Christian. His thought thus provides an excellent opportunity to study the continuing influence of some religious ideas while others are explicitly rejected.

It is expected that this thesis will demonstrate that Norman Thomas' social philosophy was an ethical socialism, founded on the Social Gospel understanding of the desirability and possibility of Christianizing the secular world, and that this philosophy remained essentially the same despite his later rejection of the Christian understanding of God. The hypothesis is that Thomas' later social philosophy was a secular expression of the Social Gospel attempt to build the Kingdom of God on earth and of Social Gospel convictions regarding the nature of that Kingdom.

2. Method and Sources

It is the concern of this thesis to study the ethics of Norman Thomas and the relationship between his ethics and his social philosophy. This is not a biography; it is Thomas' thought and not his life that is of primary
importance here. It is a general principle of historiography that men are revealed by their deeds. This is a study, however, not of the man but of his thought. In the attempt to understand ethical theory and political philosophy, theoretical pronouncements and generalizations tend to be of more importance than deeds.

This is not an exhaustive study of Thomas' social philosophy. It does not, for example, discuss Thomas' position on two important institutions, the family and education. The reason is that the central focus of Thomas' life has been on political, economic, and international problems. This study will concentrate on that central focus.

Chapter I describes the attempt, in part of American Protestantism to Christianize America. This seeking to build the Kingdom of God on earth was an essential part of pre-Civil War revivalism and culminated in the Social Gospel movement, where Christianity tended to become identified with ethical socialism, a strong emphasis on democracy, and political pacifism.

Chapter II studies Thomas' ideas when, as a
Presbyterian minister, he first became involved as a political pacifist, a civil libertarian, and a socialist. The basis for his political ideas, according to the hypothesis, was Social Gospel Christian theology and ethics.

Chapter III examines Thomas' mature social philosophy during the long years of his leadership of the American Socialist Party. This chapter will focus on the extent to which he continued a Social Gospel approach to politics despite the fact that he could no longer accept the Christian understanding of God.

The final chapter relates this case study in Christian ethics to the larger picture by situating Norman Thomas in the long history of Christian social ethics. The significance of his social philosophy is considered by comparing it to other interpretations of how to be a Christian in society.

Thomas wrote vigorously during his life. The many volumes and pamphlets and the uncounted published articles provide a wealth of sources for an understanding of Thomas' social philosophy. Valuable secondary sources
include three biographies, an analysis of Thomas' lack of political success as leader of the Socialist party, and an unpublished PH.D. thesis on Thomas' social ethics.

In addition, the large collection of the Norman Thomas Papers in the New York City Public Library provides much additional unpublished material. Thomas' unpublished Autobiography, which is largely a statement of his social philosophy, is included in this collection. These unpublished papers are very useful in gaining an understanding of Thomas' thought, especially for the period of his initial acceptance of pacifism and socialism.


3 Tex Sherwood Sample, The Social Ethics of Norman Mattoon Thomas (Boston University, 1964).
THE PROTESTANT SOCIAL GOSPEL

1. Introduction

The combination of theological and ethical ideas that provided the foundation upon which Norman Thomas' social and political philosophy was built has come to be designated the Protestant Social Gospel.

The social reform movement in American Protestantism originated in New England Calvinism, especially in the millennialism that accompanied the Great Awakening. The Calvinistic theocratic ideal became fused, in the preaching of such men as Jonathan Edwards, with the belief that the millennium was coming to America and that it was the task of Christians to speed its coming through the reform of individuals and society.

A significant development occurred in the reform tradition in pre-Civil War nineteenth-century revivalism (represented in this chapter by Charles Finney). Millennialism broke completely from the Calvinistic denial of the power of men to bring salvation to society. In addition,
revivalism came more and more to identify Christianity with specific social reforms (for example, the abolition of slavery and the elimination of drunkenness and prostitution from society). The coming Kingdom of God would be characterized by the individual and social practice of the love ethics of Jesus.

The culmination of the tradition was the Social Gospel movement at the turn of the twentieth century. At this time the attempt to Christianize society and to build the Kingdom of God in America developed a distinct tendency toward socialism and pacifism. The Social Gospel (represented in this chapter by Walter Rauschenbusch) insisted that the ethics of Christianity demanded that society function on the basis of fraternity and love; capitalistic competition and international wars were both contrary to the spirit of Christianity.

At all stages in the development of the Protestant social reform tradition, the conviction that each individual was of sacred worth remained central. Advocacy of the reform of social institutions was always accompanied by a strong emphasis, theologically, on the salvation of the individual soul and, socially, on individual equality and liberty.
In attempting to build the Kingdom of God on earth, the Social Gospel inspired a particular approach to politics and social problems. The Social Gospel political philosophy emphasized what is right rather than what is practical. It viewed history from the standpoint of moral imperatives, beginning with the goal or ideal rather than with the present. The Protestant attempt to Christianize society inspired men to become political prophets rather than pragmatic politicians.

2. Revivalism and Benevolence

The desire to build a social system in America that is the perfect expression of the Christian ideal has deep roots in American Protestantism. It was inherent in the Calvinistic theocracy of the New England Puritans and remained a powerful force in great segments of American Protestantism long after other aspects of Calvinism had been rejected. The early development of this ideal reached its most emphatic expression in the revivalist and benevolence movements of the first half of the nineteenth century.

The Puritans considered themselves the elect of God who had migrated to a new world, free from the persecutions of Europe, and had established a government ruled according
to the will of God.¹ This theocratic social philosophy resulted in a twofold understanding of the relationship between Christianity and American society: on the one hand, Christians came to identify much of what is found in their society and of what is undertaken by the civil government as the will of God; on the other hand, they undertook vigorous campaigns against those pockets of immorality that could still be found in society. The ideal of a Godly society worked both to sanctify present society and to inspire reform movements. This is the foundation on which American revivalism built; the ideal of a Christian America was at the very forefront of early revivalism.

The first powerful revivalist movement, known as the Great Awakening, swept through the American colonies about 1740. With the Great Awakening, the tendency of American Calvinism to view its task in terms of the Christianization of society was given great impetus. The movement provided both the theology and the enthusiasm for a total effort to Christianize society. Most important theologically, the

movement began to shift the understanding of the Kingdom of God from eternal individual salvation to a social kingdom on earth. Jonathan Edwards, an outstanding leader of the Great Awakening, announced in 1739, in a series of sermons,² that the millennium was coming to earth and that the people of God were capable, in some sense, of promoting it. Edwards departed from the standard doctrine of eighteenth-century New England by placing the millennium prior to the Final Judgment. The high level of spiritual and emotional excitement that accompanied revivals was seen as evidence that men were approaching the transition to the eschatological age. The millennium, Edwards insisted, would begin in America.³

The Great Awakening contributed much to the emphasis in American Protestantism on activism, on ethics, and on the individual's potential for doing good. For Edwards, the ultimate test of sainthood was whether a man was acting in


a way that would promote God's historical program. The converted, regenerated man will help bring the millennium into being; true faith must lead to action and good actions are the only evidence of good faith. Calvinistic revivalists preached "that works of charity to men could not create love of God, but that true loyalty to God and Christ must show itself in works of active charity to men." The religion of the Great Awakening demanded that individual conversions be accompanied by strenuous exertions to bring in the millennium.

Revivalism inspired humanitarianism. Evangelists attempted to convert and save as many individuals as possible. Even without the emphasis on the coming millennium that constituted part of American revivalism, the stress on the value of the individual would have been enough to encourage humanitarianism.

The many reform movements which swept over the English-speaking world in the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries owed much of their impetus to revivalism. The new humanitarian impulse

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4Heimert and Miller, op. cit., p. L.

which lay back of all such movements has a direct relationship to the revivallist emphasis upon the inestimable worth of each individual soul. If all men are equal in God's sight then it behooves Christian men to see to it that the under-privileged, the unfortunate, and the downtrodden have a better chance in this world.  

Countless humanitarian movements and "benevolence societies" spread throughout America in the first part of the nineteenth century. The growth of these movements coincided with the new wave of revivalism that rolled over the states at the turn of the century. The period of greatest activity on the part of both revivalists and reformers was, roughly, the period from 1825-1860. The direct relationship between revivalism and reform movements has been well-established by historians.

The benevolence movement was a religious movement. It aimed at evangelizing individuals and planting churches; it encouraged revivals and promoted the reading of the


7See, for example, Gilbert Barnes, The Antislavery Impulse 1830-1844 (Gloucester, Mass., 1957); Whitney R. Cross, The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1950); Alice Tyler, Freedom's Ferment (Minneapolis, 1944).
Bible; it sponsored missionary efforts and created Sunday schools. The movement was not limited to Christianizing individuals through these means. Its supporters, intending nothing less than perfecting society, launched great crusades for temperance, prison reform, rehabilitation of prostitutes, education, the abolition of slavery, and world peace; movements were established to aid the blind, the deaf, the insane. Revivalists and humanitarian reformers worked together to establish the Kingdom of God in America.

Nineteenth-century American revivalism was a movement much greater in extent and in duration than the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century. Evangelists conducted revivals in all parts of the country and, in many places, revivalist fervor surfaced time after time after time. The 1825-1860 generation of American evangelism differed from the Great Awakening in more ways than size and duration, however. Two important developments in the revivalist desire to Christianize America should be noted. In the first place, revivalism came to be characterized by a more "liberal" theology. What had been considered by Calvinists to be primarily the work of God (revivals, the millennium) came often to be considered the work of men. This was closely related
to the other development that took place. Specific changes in social institutions (such as the abolition of slavery) came to be looked upon as essential to the Christianization of America. Christianity demanded that men (not God) make the specific reforms in society.

The greatest representative of the new revivalism was Charles G. Finney. Finney, a self-taught minister, can in many ways be considered the initiator of modern revivalism. He departed from the Calvinism of Edwards by denying that revivals and conversions were solely the work of God and not of men. Calvinism was characterized by its stress on the active power of God and on the determined nature of man (Edwards' Calvinism is clearly seen in his doctrine of the determination of the will, in his belief that revivals were miracles over which men had absolutely no control, and in his practice of staring straight ahead while preaching so that his gestures and expressions would not interfere with God's action on the hearts of his listeners). To Finney, men were free and capable of promoting revivals and of changing their own hearts. Revivalism came to be seen as a technique used by men to convert others to the will of God. Conversion is possible for everyone. All that is necessary
is that he will it. Finney did not deny predestination explicitly; he simply got up and said, time after time after time, that anyone can be saved who wills it.\footnote{For an introduction to Finney, see William G. McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism. Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham (New York, 1959) and James E. Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism," Church History, XXXVIII (1969), 338-358. A good taste of the original is Charles G. Finney, Lectures on Revivals of Religion (Cambridge, Mass., 1960).}

Finney was an expert at convincing men that they willed to be converted; he employed browbeating, protracted meetings, and the "anxious seat" (Edwards had not even looked at his listeners!). He insisted that men were meant to be masters of their own fate; the conversion of the nation depended upon the right use of the right means.

By utilizing Finney's principles, Americans thought they could effect the nation's Christian liberty just as quickly as they had effected political liberty. Through this device for harnessing the divine to the human, it seemed to Finney and his contemporaries that American ingenuity and the clear insight of free men in a new world had solved the last problem in the way to achieving the millennium.\footnote{McLoughlin, op. cit., p. 121.}

Finney's goal was the perfection of mankind, beginning in America, through the creation of a new race of revival ministers.
As was true of most of the other leading evangelists of the period, Finney was not primarily interested in theology or dogma. Their concern was to convert individuals and lead the nation to regeneration. "Ethical concerns replaced dogmatic zeal in evangelical preaching and writing."10 When the evangelists did develop a system of theology, as Finney did, it was usually done in defense of their revival methods and to justify their ethical concerns.11 The Christianization of the nation through revivals and social reform was Finney's self-appointed work.

Perhaps the chief significance of Charles G. Finney lies not so much in the fact that he was the instrument in adding tens of thousands to the active ranks of the American churches, as in the circumstance that these new converts became active participants in every forward movement of their time.12

The nature of revivalism—benevolence, religion, and ethics is best understood in terms of four doctrines that were central in the work of Finney and most other revivalists. These are the doctrines of sin, benevolence, perfection, and the millennium.


12 Sweet, op. cit., p. 160.
Finney's doctrine of sin was directly related to his theology of conversion and to his doctrine of the free individual. Sin is real but it is seen as a diseased condition of the soul rather than as a sinful nature. There can be no sin apart from transgression; no person is 'sinful without exercising his powers of moral agency. Sin consists of selfishness, man's voluntary bondage to his own appetite and love of the world. God's grace is available to cleanse sin away; by turning away from self-gratification to the will of God and the welfare of men, the individual is saved.13

The doctrine of disinterested benevolence proposed the goal of working constantly for the happiness of others. The way to individual happiness is the opposite of selfishness: "If we desire the happiness of others, their happiness will increase our own."14 It is the obligation of the true Christian to do whatever he can for the good of others: "If they see an opportunity where they can do more good, they must embrace it whatever may be the sacrifice to themselves."15

13Johnson, op. cit., pp. 352-357.
14Quoted in McLoughlin, op. cit., p. 103.
15Quoted, ibid.
The doctrine of perfection, or sanctification, was also very widespread among the evangelists of the pre-Civil War period. This doctrine meant that men are capable of acquiring, after regeneration, a state of perfect holiness on earth. Being similar to Wesley's doctrine of sanctification, the doctrine of perfection meant that the sanctified Christian could learn to restrain his evil impulses and perform his obligations perfectly. The notion of perfection reinforced the ethical side of revivalism by insisting that it was fully possible to know the will of God and live up to its demands. Perfectionism is closely related to other aspects of revivalist thought that have already been considered:

Evangelism spawned Arminianism, and Arminianism of both the Wesleyan and Oberlin varieties bore perfectionism. Most important, the ethical earnestness native to revivalism attained fullest expression in the doctrine of entire consecration to God's will; an idea which was the pith and marrow of the holiness crusade. At the high tide of revivalism, perfectionism was the crest of the wave.

The doctrine of the millennium was, in a way, the social equivalent of individual benevolence and perfection. Finney, like most of his contemporaries, thought that through

16Smith, op. cit., pp. 141-142.
the spread of Christianity, the whole world was moving to-
ward a state of perfection. The millennium would begin in
America where the widespread interest in revivalism and the
great strides the United States was making toward freedom,
prosperity, piety, morality, and the pursuit of happiness
for all the citizens indicated that the millennial age might
begin soon. Millennialism was very common at this period of
American history. It was an optimistic postmillennialism
rather than a pessimistic premillennialism that predominated.
Finney opposed the movement led by William Miller, who
preached that Christ would come in judgment in 1843, not so
much because Miller thought the kingdom was imminent but be-
cause he insisted that the judgment must precede the millen-
nium (premillennialism). Finney and his colleagues thought
Miller completely mistaken to believe that the world was
getting worse instead of improving. The reform movements
and the great progress in morality that had come with revival-
list activity were pointed to as sure evidence of progress.17
The millennium would come before the judgment (postmillen-
nialism).

17McLoughlin, op. cit., p. 106.
Postmillennialism was a powerful factor in fostering social reform movements. In discussing the western New York State district that was intensely affected by revivalism,

Cross notes:

Intent upon the eradication of evil... Burned-over District folk could be expected to join zealously in any campaign against sin, wherein a victory might launch the millennium. Their particular function would be not to give birth to an idea, but to invigorate it upon importation. 18

The doctrines of sin, benevolence, perfection, and the millennium combined to lead many thousands of American Protestants of the pre-Civil War era toward social reform. Since the individual was considered master of his own fate (sin, salvation, and perfection all depended upon his decision) and since the proper Christian choice was the disinterested struggle for the happiness of others and the beginning of the millennium on earth, "Tens of thousands turned from selfishness and chose 'benevolence as a controlling preference of mind.' " 19 The reform movements included concern over such relatively "safe" issues as

18 Cross, op. cit., p. 217.

19 Barnes, op. cit., p. 16.
drunkenness and prostitution as well as involvement in such explosive crusades as abolition. Slavery was wrong (for Finney, slavery was a sin of selfishness, the robbing of another human being of his body, his time, and his earnings to promote the interests of the master\textsuperscript{20}) and because it was wrong it must be eliminated from society. Certain specific reforms came to be identified as demanded by Christianity and as necessary to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth.

The central doctrines of revivalism-benevolence promoted a type of political and social ethics that is vastly different from the pragmatism that often characterizes social thought. Belief in the perfectibility of individuals and of society and the attempt to reform all of society on the basis of the virtues of unselfishness do not permit a social philosophy characterized by practical-mindedness, balance of interests, or compromise. The revivalist tradition inspired a social ethic that sought to conform the present as quickly as possible to the coming Kingdom.

The evangelical reform movements did not produce, during this period, any significant criticism of the

\textsuperscript{20}McLoughlin, op. cit., p. 109.
capitalistic economic order. Right at the essence of pre-
Civil War American evangelism was the doctrine of the free
individual. Morality, even social reform, was discussed
primarily in individual terms; social problems were to be
solved through the conversion of individuals. The revival-
ists tended to see the established economic institutions as
good, even as designed by God. Problems of poverty were to
be solved by the conversion of the wealthy, who would then
engage in beneficial philanthropic ventures. The individual-
ism of the economic system was related to the evangelistic
doctrine of the free individual; the criterion of unselfish-
ness was not yet being frequently applied to the economic
order. 21

In the decades preceding the Civil War, much of
American Protestantism was affected by the revivalist-bene-
volence movement. It was by no means the only form of
Protestantism in existence during that era, but no denomina-
tion escaped its influence. The attempt to Christianize

21 For a discussion of the economic ideas of the
evangelists, see Charles C. Cole, The Social Ideas of the
Northern Evangelists 1820-1860 (New York, 1954), pp. 165F.
society meant that society was to be organized and to function on the basis of Christian ethics. The Protestant emphasis on the individual was not lost; society was to be reformed through the conversion of individuals. Nevertheless, the social and political millennialism that was part of the revivalist movement and the identification of sin as selfishness laid the basis for the later conviction of some American Protestants that socialism, the most Christian of economic orders, must be established. It was in the Social Gospel movement at the end of the nineteenth century that Protestant postmillennialism came more and more to mean Christian socialism.

3. The Social Gospel

The Social Gospel movement in American Protestantism, an important part of the American religious and social scene during the years 1880-1920, was a continuation of the evangelical attempt to Christianize America. The major developments that the Social Gospel contributed to the tradition were an increased concern for the conversion of social institutions and the growth of the conviction that a Christian America would be a socialist America. It retained the tradition's political millennialism.
The Social Gospel has been subject to two major interpretations. Most of the major histories of the movement were written from the stimulus-response perspective; the Social Gospel was seen primarily as part of the Protestant reaction to the urbanization and industrialization that was rapidly transforming America after the Civil War. Other students of American Protestantism, especially more recently, have minimized the extent to which the Social Gospel should be understood as a new phenomenon explainable in terms of a reaction to social forces outside the religious tradition, and have seen the movement as a continuation of the desire to Christianize America that, long before the Civil War, had permeated the evangelical revivalist tradition. The two interpretations are not, of course, exclusive.


23 See, for example, Robert T. Handy, "The Protestant Quest for a Christian America 1830-1930," *Church History*, XXII (1953), 8-20; Smith, op. cit., pp. 149f.
The roots of the American Social Gospel are varied. It was part of a developing world-wide movement which had grown under the impact of the industrial revolution. The work of such English Christian Socialists as F. D. Maurice had provided some of the stimulus for Christian social movements in the United States. Other important influences included the evolutionary progressivism of the new liberal theology, the social thought of men like Edward Bellamy and Henry George, and the personal experiences of poverty and the problems of laboring men in newly industrialized America by Social Gospel leaders.

Despite these influences, some of which are from abroad, the primary influences on the Social Gospel are indigenous both to America and to American Protestantism.

The roots of the social gospel movement...sank deep into the early years of the nineteenth century, where they found strong nourishment in the radicalism of Channing, the ethical impulses of evangelicalism, and the liberal views of Bushnell. But it was not until American Protestantism was released from the preoccupation with the slavery issue that it could turn its attention to the ethical aspects of the new capitalistic civilization.24

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There can be little doubt that "the social gospel movement was an outgrowth of the older American evangelicalism." 25 The main root was the postmillennial ethics of pre-Civil War American revivalism. Though the Social Gospel critique of society was somewhat different, the underlying ethical attitudes were the same. The Social Gospel was a later expression of the evangelistic quest for a Christian America.

In the decades between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century, American Protestantism became largely polarized, a division that had little, or nothing, to do with denominational barriers. Protestantism came to be Private Protestantism or Social Protestantism. 26 The former style, having appropriated the term 'evangelical' that characterized all Protestants in the early part of the nineteenth century, "accented individual salvation out of the world, personal moral life congruent with the ideals of the saved, and fulfillment or its absence in the rewards or punishments in another world in a life to come." 27 The


26 Ibid., p. 179.

27 Ibid.
second informal group emphasized the transformation of this world. "Without necessarily losing faith in another world and a destiny there, this 'public' group supplemented or complemented that faith with a parallel accent on what a pioneer in the party, Washington Gladden, called 'The Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.'"  

The private style of Protestantism took over revivalist techniques for stimulating conversions and the reaffirmations of faith. The very terms "evangelists" and "revivalists" came to be applied almost exclusively to preachers in the Dwight Moody tradition. This tradition tended toward conservatism socially and toward fundamentalism theologically. In their efforts to separate man from sin and to prepare him for heaven, the Moodyites abandoned the social side of the pre-Civil War revivalism. Their social message was confined to calls for law and order and their ethical appeals restricted to calls for repentance from private vices.

\[28\text{Rbid.}\]

\[29\text{Rbid., p. 180.}\]
The evangelical quest for a Christian American occupied a more vital place in social Protestantism than in private Protestantism. While modern revivalists preached premillennialism (Moody defined his mission thus: "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can.'" 30), the social form of Protestantism adhered to the earlier postmillennialism. Following in the tradition of Edwards and Finney, social Protestants looked upon the world not as a wrecked vessel from which people should be rescued, but as the location of the coming Kingdom of God. 31

Though the Social Gospel movement was many faceted, there was sufficient agreement among the principal leaders that one can characterize the movement as a whole:

A complex and dynamic movement in history, the social gospel was variously expressed by its several generations of leaders. Yet its main emphasis can be rather briefly stated. These include a conviction that the social principles of the historical Jesus could serve as reliable guides for both individual and social life in any age. Central to the teachings so these liberal social Christians believed, was a stress on the imminence of God, the goodness and

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30 Quoted ibid., p. 184.

31 Ibid., pp. 184-186.
worth of man, and the coming kingdom of God on earth. Indeed, they affirmed, at the very heart of his gospel was the message of the kingdom, which they interpreted as a possibility within history.\textsuperscript{32}

The Social Gospel movement was an attempt to establish the Kingdom of God on earth through an application of the love ethics of Christianity to social as well as personal situations. A belief in the basic goodness of men led to the conviction that vigorous efforts to eliminate injustices would soon produce a more Christian social life. For Social Gospelers, the ethical principles of Jesus that are to be the guidelines for individuals and society can best be summarized thus: the human person is of sacred worth; brotherhood is the proper relationship between man and man; the law for individual and social behavior is loving service.\textsuperscript{33}

The Social Gospel was a native American social philosophy of considerable strength that was opposed to the pragmatism that is often considered the American social philosophy. It sought to transform society into the ideal society.


\textsuperscript{33}See Donald B. Meyer, The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941 (Berkeley, 1960), pp. 19f.
the Kingdom of God on earth. It approached social problems primarily in terms of what is called for by Christian ethics, the ethics of the Kingdom. Pragmatism, on the other hand, tended to limit its vision to the present society and emphasized the practical solutions to problems. The starting point for the Social Gospel was the Kingdom that was not fully realized in the present. The pragmatist sought workable solutions to immediate problems without appeals to a future ideal society.

The nature of the Social Gospel can be seen more clearly by a consideration of one representative of the movement, Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch was probably the most outstanding figure in the whole movement, the "Prophet of the Social Gospel." Walter Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel, Norman Thomas asserted later, was very influential in Thomas' developing social philosophy.34

Walter Rauschenbusch was an American Baptist; his ancestry was German Lutheran (pietist).35 His early religious values, he recalled, were the individualistic ones

35 For a biography of Rauschenbusch, see Sharpe, op. cit.
common to much of the Protestantism of his day. He attributed his awakening to social problems not to the Church but to his personal contact with poverty during his eleven years as minister in New York's "Hell's Kitchen." He was also influenced by social reformers: "I owe my own first awakening to the world of social problems to the agitation of Henry George in 1886, and wish here to record my life-long debt to this single-minded apostle of a great truth." (George was a candidate for Mayor of New York City in 1886.)

It is important to note that Rauschenbusch's thought began not so much with the liberal theology of his day as with his ethical reaction to the society in which he lived. His contact with social problems led him to work out a theology that would take into account these conditions as well as his personal faith. While his theology is important as an expression of his principles, it is not primary. The Social Gospel came first; a theology for the Social Gospel came later. He was concerned with Christianizing society; his theology was developed on the basis of that desire. The test of any theology, said Rauschenbusch, is "the question

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whether it does justice to the religious consciousness of sin."\(^{38}\)

H. Richard Niebuhr has stinging criticized late nineteenth-century Protestant liberalism thus: "A god without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."\(^{39}\) Though there are many points at which Rauschenbusch's thought is similar to liberalism,\(^{40}\) it is quite clear that such a characterization would not accurately reflect the true nature of Rauschenbusch's thought. As this brief description of his thought will indicate, the consciousness of sin is very important: conversion is required; the coming kingdom is judgment as well as promise. The tension between the is and the ought is very much present and Rauschenbusch is strikingly reminiscent of Finney and other earlier revivalists in insisting that the tension


could be resolved only by pressing forward into a new life free from its former bondage.

The concept of the Kingdom of God was, in Rauschenbusch's own opinion, the central idea around which everything else in his thought revolved. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom on earth. It has begun but is not yet complete; men, especially Christians, can contribute toward its further evolutionary development. The Kingdom is a realm of love in which the institutions of life are fundamentally fraternal and cooperative. In the Kingdom there is equal opportunity for all; exploitation and self-service are contrary to the very nature of the Kingdom.\footnote{Millennialism is at the heart of Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel.}

The ethical principles that are involved in Rauschenbusch's concept of the Kingdom are three, all of which are interrelated: the absolute value of human personality, the solidarity of mankind, and love.

Hopkins has written of the Social Gospel movement in general: "Although much stress was laid upon collectivism
and the effect of external factors, the movement never lost sight of the basically religious contention that the social crusade began in and existed for the individual.\footnote{Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel, op. cit., p. 321.} This was certainly true of Rauschenbusch. Though a great prophet of social Christianity, he retained all his life an evangelical concern for the conversion and salvation of individuals. He always remained intensely interested in missionary activity and insisted upon an evangelical conception of missions: "nothing can exceed in value the regeneration of individual souls."\footnote{Walter Rauschenbusch, "Conceptions of Missions," in Handy (ed.), The Social Gospel, op. cit., p. 271.} A significant indication of Rauschenbusch's concern for personal religion was his decision to speak on that topic at the New York State Conference on Religion in 1906. He was becoming famous for his social work at that time and the conference was devoted almost exclusively to problems of social salvation. Yet he chose to speak on personal religion.\footnote{V. P. Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and Its Relationship to Religious Education (New Haven, Conn., 1944), p. 46.}
Rauschenbusch's hopes for the improvement of the social order depended upon the conversion of individuals: "the most immediate and constant need in Christianizing the social order is for more religious individuals." Even social Christianity is individualistic in the sense that it begins with individual conversion and seeks the salvation of individuals, before all else.

The social thought of Rauschenbusch also emphasized the importance of the individual. "True Christianity emphasizes to the utmost the value of the individual, and has been the real motive power back of the efforts to secure personal liberty." Personal liberty and personal equality based on the supreme value of each individual are the ideals to be achieved by a Christianized social order. In that

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45 Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order, op. cit., p. 460.
46 Ibid., p. 462.
famous and often-criticized section of Christianizing the Social Order where Rauschenbusch argues that four major aspects of our social order -- the family, church, education, and political life -- have already been largely Christianized (as contrasted to the economic order, which is yet far from Christian), the criteria used to determine Christianization are clearly personal liberty and personal equality. The Church "was Christianized when it lost its power and its will to tyrannize."48 Education was Christianized when schools became available for all.49 "The fundamental redemption of the state took place when special privilege was thrown out... and it was based on the principle of personal liberty and equal rights."50

Emphasis on individual liberty was at the essence of Rauschenbusch's social thought; he even tended to see democracy as part of the Kingdom of God and to claim America as the most Christian of nations because of its freedom. Yet he

48 Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order, op. cit., p. 139.

49 ibid., p. 145.

50 ibid., p. 148.
never considered freedom to mean the social philosophy of
"rugged individualism." Consider the entire paragraph from
which the emphasis on the value of the individual was quoted:

True Christianity emphasizes to the utmost the value
of the individual, and has been the real motive power
back of the effort to secure personal liberty. But
it contains more than individualism; it also contains
the principle of association; and implants the trust-
worthiness, love, and unselfishness which cement men
together and make association a workable idea. In
so far, therefore, as socialism is the effort to
translate into facts of political economy the Chris-
tian tendency to association, in so far it has a
right to claim our approval. 51

Rauschenbusch spent much of his life crusading against
the individualism that pervaded the economic order, and against
the individualistic theology of the churches that supported
the economic order. In championing economic reform,
Rauschenbusch emphasized the ethical principles of solidarity
and love.

The principle of the solidarity of mankind means
that fraternity is one of the fundamentals of Christian life.
There is a sacredness to fellowship. Everyone is bound up
in many ways to the men around him and the nature of his
existence is not separate from the nature of theirs. True

Christianity must teach this principle of association, and implant "the trustworthiness, love, and unselfishness which cement men together and make association a workable idea."

Rauschenbusch attempted to get this principle of solidarity accepted in the economic order. In so doing, he differed significantly from the Finney-generation revivalists who had supported economic individualism. The difference is real, but Rauschenbusch's position can be seen as a logical development of the earlier tradition. Rauschenbusch's concern for individual liberty and equality (which was shared by Finney) led him to the realization that economic individualism means the exploitation of many by some. Rauschenbusch's view of sin as selfishness (a view shared by Finney) led him to the conclusion that capitalistic self-seeking is sinful. Finney had taught that benevolence meant that each individual should seek the best for all. Rauschenbusch applied this idea to society and arrived at the principle of solidarity and the hope for a socialistic economic order.

Finney had been a spokesman for most elements in the
dominant American tradition of self reliance. Rauschenbusch, by following through logically from the same principles that Finney taught, arrived at a quite radical (though still American) critique of economic individualism. The Protestant evangelical revivalist tradition had supplied the impetus for an American Christian socialism.

The third ethical principle of the Kingdom of God is the supreme law of love. Love is to rule human affairs, a love that comes out of respect for personality and a feeling of brotherhood. Love is unselfishness. The highest expression of it is the free surrender of what is one's own -- even one's own life; a lower but important and practical expression of love is the surrender of any opportunity for the exploitation of others.53 Love, for Rauschenbusch, is intimately related to respect for personal liberty and to a fraternal economic order.

Rauschenbusch's espousal of socialism was based on the conviction that socialism is "the most thorough and consistent economic elaboration of the Christian social ideal."

53 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, op. cit., p. 143.
It is far and away the most powerful force for justice, democracy, and organized fraternity in the modern world."\(^{54}\)

Though some of society has already been Christianized by being based on the principles of individual dignity and cooperation, capitalistic commerce and industry remain an immoral, unregenerate part of the social order. Capitalism is not based on freedom, equality, love, and mutual service, but "on autocracy, antagonism of interests, and exploitation."\(^{55}\) Capitalism is unfraternal; it is the opposite of cooperation; it is not Christian.

In all the operations of capitalistic industry and commerce the aim that controls and directs is not the purpose to supply human needs, but to make a profit for those who direct industry. This itself is an irrational and unchristian adjustment of the social order, for it sets money up as the prime aim, and human life as something secondary, or as a means to secure money. The supremacy of Profit in Capitalism stamps it as a mammonistic organization with which Christianity can never be content.\(^{56}\)

Rauschenbusch was convinced that capitalism was contrary to the ethics of the Kingdom. One of the holy forces

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\(^{54}\) Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, op. cit., p. 397.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., p. 313.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.
in human society is devotion to the common good. Capitalism sets the private interest before the common good. This seeking after profit sows the seeds of many other social evils. Since war is sometimes seen as necessary to create or protect profit, the capitalistic system involves men and nations in war. Capitalism is largely responsible for the corruption of legislatures and courts that can be found in the nation. In general, "Capitalism has generated a spirit of its own which is antagonistic to the spirit of Christianity; a spirit of hardness and cruelty that neutralizes the Christian spirit of love; a spirit that sets material goods above spiritual possessions." 57

Socialism, for Rauschenbusch, is much more Christian as an economic organization of society. The ideal goals of society -- freedom, justice, democracy, cooperation of all in a fraternal commonwealth -- cannot be achieved through our present individualistic outlook and a social order based on competition for private profit.

Rauschenbusch characterized his socialism as a "practical socialism," with the emphasis being on the immediate social reforms that would be steps into a full socialist

57 Ibid., p. 315.
society, the public ownership of the principle means of production. Rauschenbusch's "practical socialism" involved proposals for a Henry George type of land tax, a steeply graduated inheritance tax, the organization and strengthening of trade unions, and the improvement of working conditions. 

In all this the ultimate aim of socialism need not be lost sight of. On the contrary, the reform measures would gain intelligent direction and the swing of hope, if they were all regarded as steps in the great process of regaining the rights of the people and of evoking a social organization in which liberty, equality, and fraternity would be possible.

Rauschenbusch believed that the cause of the Kingdom of God could be served through political organization. Believing as he did that socialism was a movement which approached to a considerable degree the ideal of the Kingdom, he joined the Christian Socialist Fellowship and served on its executive committee. The Fellowship had been founded, in 1906, to spread socialist principles among church people: "to show the necessity of socialism to a complete realization...

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of the teachings of Jesus; to end the class struggle by establishing industrial and political democracy, and to hasten the reign of justice and brotherhood upon earth."60

At its founding the Fellowship expressly pledged its support to the Socialist Party; its newspaper, The Christian Socialist, frequently urged its readers to join the Party.61 Rauschenbusch himself, however, never did join the Socialist Party. He was solidly opposed to the atheistic materialism that was part of the socialist theory of many Marxists and this fact was, apparently, the major reason he never joined the Party.

"Dogmatic socialists" was the term given by Rauschenbusch to those socialists who were opposed to immediate practical reforms and were concerned only with the total socialist revolution. He severely criticized the revolutionaries:

The attitude of the dogmatic socialists constantly reminds me of certain Christians, whom we call Millenniumarians. They believe that this is a bad world and getting worse all the time; that it is folly to try to improve it by social reforms; that any apparent improvements are promptly captured by the devil and only make things worse. They stake all


61Ibid.
their hope on the return of Christ, who will come when things have got to the worst and make all things new. Meanwhile there is nothing to do, but gather some who will watch and wait and share in the glory when it comes. In the same way the revolutionary socialists regard the present as hopelessly bad; they are pleased to see it getting worse; they expect their new Jerusalem to come suddenly and they stake all on that hope; meanwhile they sit and wait for the decay of the old order, gathering a party of socialist believers who will be ready for it when it comes.\footnote{Rauschenbusch, "Dogmatic and Practical Socialism," op. cit., pp. 205-206.}

Rauschenbusch was emphatically a gradualist socialist. His criticism of dogmatic socialism reminds one of Finney's criticism of premillennialism. The world is not getting worse and salvation will not be the result of a sudden upheaval.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 203-216.} Revolutionary socialists are mistaken, thought Rauschenbusch, in their judgment that economic conditions are getting worse and that the present order of society is near collapse. The evolutionary socialism of Rauschenbusch is a continuation of American Protestant postmillennialism.

As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, it was becoming more and more common in the Social Gospel movement as a whole for socialism to be advocated as the best
social and economic application of the ethics of Christianity.

One of the outstanding facts distinguishing the 1890's from the previous decade of social gospel development was a marked change in attitude toward socialism. Unanimously rejected in the 'eighties, socialism nevertheless served as a powerful stimulus to the socializing of Christianity. In the last years of the century, however, its aims and program were examined with distinctly less hostility, much good was found in them, and an appreciable number of clergymen embraced, a Christianized version of socialism as the ideal formulation of the religious social gospel. 64

It had taken time for many Social Gospelers, reared as they had been in an atmosphere of economic individualism, to conclude that the ethical principles of Christ, applied to the whole of society, logically implied some form of socialism.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, many of those who were intent upon the Christianization of American society were working for the socialist cause.

A similar development, though not so complete, took place in the Social Gospel approach to war. Just as it had taken the industrialization of the country after the Civil War and the rise of secular socialism to awaken Social

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Gospelers to the conclusion that the ethical principles of Finney-style reform meant socialism, so it took the approach and outbreak of the Great War in Europe and the Socialist analysis of the causes of the war to spur these men to the conclusion that war is contrary to Christianity and the Kingdom of God.

The Social Gospel was not necessarily pacifistic, but many of its key ideas led in that direction. The movement was an attempt to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, to bring about a society of justice and peace through the application of the ethics of Kingdom to social and international problems. At the essence of the Social Gospel was the conviction that men could be improved and that they would respond to proposals for reform of those institutions which prevented them from living full and happy lives. Before World War I, the movement was primarily concerned with the internal affairs of the nation; during and after the war, much attention was given to the elimination of war as a cause of so much misery and as an obstacle to the realization of a Christian society.

Walter Rauschenbusch's understanding of war changed drastically from the Spanish-American War in 1898 to World
War I. Though never so imperialistic as those Social Gospellers who spoke of the Spanish war in terms of American or Anglo-Saxon God-given destiny (even Washington Gladden would have to be numbered in this group\textsuperscript{65}), Rauschenbusch gladly endorsed the action of the United States in 1898 and went to great lengths to explain and justify the American position, especially to Germans.\textsuperscript{66} During World War I, on the other hand, he joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation and gave an important address to that pacifistic organization in 1917. For Rauschenbusch, his new position followed naturally from his ideals:

\begin{quote}
I have been a Christian supporter of the peace idea for some years. During the Spanish-American War I took the average attitude and voiced it effectively. But shortly afterward the peace movement got a strong hold on me. You would expect that, from what you know about my social leanings, and especially my attitude about the teachings of Jesus ever since 1887. Thus religious opposition against war as such has strengthened steadily as my observation has gone on. I have joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{66}Rauschenbusch published, in June, 1898, a long article on the war in the \textit{Frankfurter Zeitung}, one of the most widely read newspapers in Germany. See Sharpe, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 358.
spirit of which you probably know.

The Socialist critique of war has also influenced me, especially to hold to international points of view, and to emphasize the economic factor in the emotionalism of war and in diplomacy. 67

Despite the fact that Rauschenbusch joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, it is not certain that he became an absolute pacifist. He clearly reached the conclusion that war is a denial of Christian love and closely related to the immoral system of capitalism, but it is probable that he thought of war as a necessary evil at times. Confusion exists as to his final position on that question because, throughout the years from 1914 to 1918 (the year of his death), he was accused of being a German sympathizer and became quite reluctant to speak or write on the question of war. 68

Whether he ever became an absolute pacifist or not, Rauschenbusch already exemplified the relationship of the Social Gospel to pacifism. Society was to be organized so that it would function on the basis of Christian ethics. If


68 Chapter 16 of Sharpe is probably the best treatment of Rauschenbusch's attitude toward war.
some institution or policy (such as war) was opposed to the love and cooperation of the Kingdom, it must be eliminated from society. The most one could do by way of compromising with such an evil was to realize that it took some time to make great changes in society. If war is wrong, politics based on ethics must oppose war as such (as Rauschenbusch expressed it). The Social Gospel was devoted to the future total realization of the Christian Kingdom and, as such, led quite naturally to pacifism.

By the time of World War I, the revivalist-Social Gospel tradition had reached its greatest strength. Some of the characteristics of the movement should be noted. In the first place, it was an American Protestant religious tradition that sanctioned a principled rather than a pragmatic form of social and political ethics. In addition, the tradition, by the time it reached its maturity, had come to specify capitalism, war, and tyranny as evil, and socialism, pacifism, and individual liberties/democracy as Christian. The three ethical focal points of the Social Gospel were love, solidarity, and the sacred worth of the individual. The tendency to identify Christianity and socialism followed from the definition of Christianity in terms of love and cooperation and fraternity; the exclusion of antagonistic
interests. The same definition explains the tendency toward pacifism. The near identification of democracy with Christianity resulted from the emphasis on the dignity of each individual. The Kingdom of God is to be achieved, according to the Social Gospel, by working for the end of the competition for private profit, of the destructive conflicts between nations, and of tyranny and inequality.

The Social Gospel represents the culmination of a particular religious approach to politics. The economic and social organization of society was to be based on love and fraternity; any institution denying these ideals was wrong and should be transformed. The goal of politics was not (as the pragmatist sees it) finding workable solutions for everyday problems; the goal of politics was the building of the Kingdom of God through the elimination of capitalism, war, and tyranny.

4. The Social Gospel and Thomas

The relationship of Norman Thomas to the Social Gospel can be demonstrated on three levels. First, Thomas received his theological education at the height of the popularity of the Social Gospel and later acknowledged that Rauschenbüscher had greatly influenced his thought. Secondly,
Thomas' social philosophy had the same starting point as that of the Social Gospel: all of society was to be perfected on the model of the coming Kingdom. Thirdly, Thomas' understanding of the operative principles of the Kingdom was the same as that of the Social Gospel: love, cooperation, and the supreme value of the individual. The second and third parts of this comparison can only be stated here; the full demonstration is found in the discussion of the nature of Thomas' thought that constitutes the greater part of this thesis.

The Social Gospel was at the height of its popularity when Thomas was a theological student in 1908-1912 at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Thomas fully encountered the spirit of the Social Gospel a few years later, however, when he read the books of Walter Rauschenbusch. Years later Thomas wrote of Rauschenbusch's influence:

I had read Dr. Rauschenbusch's books Christianity and the Social Crisis and Christianizing the Social Order and had been much moved by them, emotionally and intellectually, but I had not definitely become a Socialist.

The process by which I was led to the Socialist Party was long and slow and reflection on the origin and nature of the First World War was the final influence. Books and men, of course, contributed to my education. I read Dr. Rauschenbusch's books at a time when pressure of administrative and pastoral
work left me very little leisure for reading. That fact, added to the excellence of the books, made them influential in my thinking. I was also deeply indebted in those years of my work in the church to his *Prayers of the Social Awakening*.

In so far as any one man or any one book, or series of books, made me a Socialist, it was probably Walter Rauschenbusch and his writings.\(^{69}\)

The Social Gospel origin of Thomas' social thought is demonstrated even more clearly by the nature of it than by acknowledgment of Rauschenbusch's influence. During World War I when he first became fully involved in political activity, Thomas' thought was characterized by political pacifism, civil libertarianism, and Christian socialism (as will be discussed in the next chapter). He wanted to build a society that was the social application of the ethical principles of Jesus. Social, economic, and political problems would be solved when men realized that the Christian principles of love, cooperation, and individual dignity were the basis for all right behavior in the world, social as well as individual. The application of these principles would result in the Christian world of tomorrow, the world to which the journal Thomas edited, *The World Tomorrow*, was dedicated. This, indeed, was the Kingdom of

\(^{69}\)Quoted *ibid.*, p. 415.
the Social Gospel.

For the Finney generation of Christian social reformers, the chief social obstacle to the Christianization of America (the realization of the millennium) was racial slavery; for the Rauschenbusch type of Social Gospelers, the major social evil was the immoral system of capitalism; for the Thomas generation of World War I Social Gospelers, war as well as capitalism had to be removed if Christianity were to fully triumph in America. For all these men and their colleagues, however, there was great hope that these evils could be removed from society because America had already gone so far toward the social recognition of individual dignity and freedom that was at the heart of a Christian nation. For all of them, the Christianization of society meant the application of the principles of love and unselfish service as well as the emphasis on the individual that implied freedom and equality. For all, the way to the realization of the ideal society lay in educating individuals to the proper understanding of right and wrong and in inspiring them to bring about the triumph of right over wrong in society.
It is possible to put this discussion in different terms. The Protestant social reform movement proclaimed and sought the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The first two, it was thought, were in many ways already present in America. When the third was achieved, the first two would also be more fully realized and the nation would be Christianized. Fraternity was being denied by slavery (Finney), by capitalism (Rauschenbusch and Thomas), and by war (Rauschenbusch and especially Thomas).

As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, Norman Thomas continued the Protestant social-reform tradition. Even though he could not accept Christianity in the last half of his life, he maintained an ethical approach to politics and continued to base his political positions almost completely on the Christian ethical principles that were central to the Social Gospel. Though Thomas left Christianity in one sense, his politics continued, at least in a secular way, the American Protestant attempt to Christianize America.
II

THOMAS THE CHRISTIAN SOCIALIST

1. Introduction

Norman Thomas began his active participation in the work of "radical" organizations when he joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a Christian pacifist movement, late in 1916. Christianity and war are incompatible, Thomas argued in a letter in July, 1917, because good is not to be accomplished by evil. Satan cannot be cast out by Satan; Christianity means that war is not to be conquered by war. "It seems to me that the validity of Christ's method of dealing with life's problems almost stands or falls with this test and that if we would honestly try His way God would guide us to unimagined solutions of our problems."

This attempt to base social life totally on Christian ethics characterized Thomas' thought as he embarked on

1 Thomas to Walter F. Muhlbach, July 31, 1917 (Found in the Norman Thomas Papers in the New York City Public Library).
what became a fifty-year campaign for peace, freedom, and economic justice. Thomas began his political career in the Protestant Social Gospel tradition. He sought the Christianization of society through the application of the principles of love, cooperation, and the value of the individual. Social Gospel ideals led Thomas to the political positions of pacifism, civil libertarianism, and Christian socialism.

When the Great War broke upon Europe in the summer of 1914, Norman Thomas was a Presbyterian pastor in New York City. Before the signing of the Armistice in November, 1918, Thomas had become a pacifist, had resigned from the parish, and had joined the Socialist Party. In addition, he had contributed to the founding of the American Civil Liberties Union, was the editor of a new radical journal that had been temporarily banned from the mails by the Federal Government, and had been threatened with prosecution under the Sedition Act. World War I was, without a doubt, the major turning point in the life of Norman Thomas.

This chapter is devoted to the war years and the immediate post-war period (especially 1916-1919). It was in these years that Thomas espoused the political positions that were, with only little change, at the center of his
thought and work for the remainder of his life. Though his pacifism, libertarianism, and socialism were closely related, it is useful to consider them separately. The chapter begins with an examination of his pacifism.

2. Pacifism

In 1914, Norman Thomas was no pacifist, on either religious or political grounds. As pastor of New York's East Harlem Presbyterian Church and chairman of the American Parish, he had become preoccupied with the problems of poverty and crime, injustice and prejudice, political corruption and racketeering. Working with parishioners who were desperately poor and in an area reputed to have the highest homicide rate in New York City, Thomas had given his attention almost entirely to local problems. It was the beginning of the war in 1914 that forced Thomas to give careful attention to questions of international morality.  

Thomas was nearly thirty years old when the war began. Born in Marion, Ohio, in 1884, he had been reared in a

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3 Ibid.
strong religious environment, being the son of a Presbyterian minister and the grandson of two Presbyterian ministers. The Presbyterianism of his father was orthodox Calvinism. Many years later, when he could no longer accept his father's faith, Thomas reflected upon it:

I never could understand why he seemed so unquestioningly to accept the Calvinist theology which he held. In the retrospect I find it harder to understand how, having accepted it, he was so tolerant of people. He believed in a hell to which all his life I do not think he ever would say that anyone was bound. I do not believe in his hell and yet have been sorely tempted to consign not a few there to! 5

Thomas' early environment was thoroughly Protestant; the socio-economic level was middle class. The home atmosphere emphasized a deep religious faith and a strong moral code. The good life that the parents wanted for the children was not wealth, but virtue and culture. Thomas remembered his mother thus: "She wanted her children to have what she

4 Information about Thomas' early life can be found in any of the three biographies that have been published and in Thomas' Autobiography. The biographies are: Murray B. Seidler, Norman Thomas: Respectable Rebel (Syracuse, 1967); Harry Fleishman, Norman Thomas A Biography: 1884-1968 (New York, 1969); Charles Gorham, Leader at Large: The Long and Fighting Life of Norman Thomas (New York, 1970).

5 Norman Thomas, As I See It (New York, 1932), p. 158.
thought were the good things of life: health, integrity, education and some cultural opportunities, but for riches as riches she had more of scorn than envy."

Thomas seems to have accepted more than he rejected from his family tradition:

What a set-up for the modern psychologically-minded biographer or novelist. A study in revolt born of reaction from Presbyterian orthodoxy and the Victorian brand of Puritanism in the midwest setting. The only trouble is that this isn't what happened.

Rather than rejecting the emphasis on morality, Thomas seems to have accepted it and maintained it throughout his adult years. "I am so old-fashioned as to be glad that I lived in a home, a time and an environment in which sin, yes, and moral vices, were realities to be forgiven and cured, but not condoned."

Family tradition more or less destined Thomas for the ministry, though it took some time before he made his final decision to go to a theological seminary. He enrolled in

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6 Ibid., p. 159.
7 Thomas, Autobiography, p. 3.
8 Ibid., p. 6.
Bucknell University in 1901 (his father had just accepted a call in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, the home of Bucknell), but was not satisfied with the quality of education there. After one year, he eagerly accepted the offer of a generous uncle to help finance the continuation of his education at Princeton. Princeton, where his grandfathers and his father had received their theological training, was considered the foremost Presbyterian institution in the country. Thomas had long wanted to study there.\textsuperscript{9}

Thomas achieved an outstanding academic record at Princeton, being particularly interested in history, economics, and debating. Though he felt a strong sense of duty to enter some form of missionary work at home or abroad, he wanted some time to think before making his decision about whether or not to seek ordination. He was also interested in a political career and was considering the study of law as the best way to prepare for politics.\textsuperscript{10}

Upon graduation from Princeton, Thomas was offered the opportunity to work with Rev. H. Roswell Bates for a year at the Spring Street Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood

\textsuperscript{9}Seidler, op. cit., p. 8

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 12
Center in New York. In a state of indecision about his profession, he accepted this offer. Thomas' experiences in the social and spiritual work of the Spring Street Church were so satisfying that he forgot law as a profession. The theological course was decided upon, but postponed. He spent a second year at Spring Street, followed by a year spent traveling around the world, a trip which had been arranged by Mr. Bates and financed by Thomas' uncle. Thomas began his studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York in the fall of 1908.\[1\]

After ordination in 1911, Thomas assumed the positions of pastor of New York's East Harlem Presbyterian Church and chairman of the American Parish (a federation of Presbyterian churches and social agencies located in immigrant neighborhoods). Thomas remained in these positions until 1918, when he resigned from parish work.\[2\]

By 1916 Thomas' thinking on the whole question of war, thinking that was stimulated somewhat by the newly formed Fellowship of Reconciliation, led him to the firm conviction that Christianity and the use of war as a method for

\[1\]Ibid., pp. 12-13.
\[2\]Ibid., p. 15.
securing peace are in complete opposition. His opposition was based not on individual texts of the New Testament or on particular statements of Jesus; rather it was the whole philosophy and ethics of Jesus that he considered opposed to the acceptance of war. "God, I felt, was certainly not the 'God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' if his servants could only serve him and the cause of righteousness by the diabolic means of war." 13

Thomas' pacifism was thoroughly Christian: war was wrong because it was contrary to the ideals and ethical principles of Christianity. Christians should follow the teachings of Jesus even when these teachings do not seem practical. God's way is what is best for society despite its seeming impracticality from the point of view of those who have little faith. "If we would honestly try His way God would guide us to unimagined solutions of our problems." 14

Christian ethics, Thomas thought, makes good politics.

Thomas joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation in

14 Thomas to Walter F. Muhlbauch, July 31, 1917 (Thomas Papers).
1916 and very quickly became one of the guiding figures in the movement. By 1917 he was a member of the executive staff and was devoting much of his time to the work of the Fellowship. Because of Thomas' whole-hearted endorsement of the FOR, a consideration of the nature of the FOR contributes to an understanding of Thomas' pacifism.

The Fellowship of Reconciliation was founded in England in 1914 by a small group of Christians led by Henry Hodgkin, a Quaker. The type of pacifism represented by the FOR at its beginning was, in large part, traditional non-political sectarian witness. In the following year the Fellowship was organized in the United States and shortly thereafter a different type of pacifism became dominant among the American members. Due largely to the Social Gospel belief that good Christianity is good politics, the Fellowship moved from sectarian witness to political strategy. By the end of 1917 the movement that had begun as apolitical witness was clearly established in America as political pacifism.

15 Thomas to Howard A. Walter, January 31, 1917 (Thomas Papers).
Historically, most Christian pacifism has been apolitical. Early Christians, for example, did not think of their refusal to serve in the armies of the Empire as a tactic that would bring an end to war, a particular war or war in general. They considered it wrong for them to go to war because to do so would be to disobey the love ethic of Jesus. The goal of traditional Christian pacifism has not been the establishment of peace on earth. The refusal to serve in combat is based, in this tradition, on the obligation to follow the word of God rather than the words of men. The system of government coercion and international war is seen as part of an evil system, a system that Christians should not so much attempt to reform as to avoid. Because of the sins of men, one cannot expect the social order to be organized on the basis of Christian principles. It is the obligation of Christians, a Mennonite member of this tradition argues, to be "fulfilling a higher mission and nobler service to society than if they compromised their own ethical principles to engage in the relativities of statescraft and political action." Politics is for others; Christians are


18Guy F. Hershberger, War, Peace, and Nonresistance (Scottdale, Pa., 1944), p. 301.
called to something higher.

Apolitical Christian pacifism has not been advocated because of any belief that the world can be made free from war. It was based much more on the conviction that the world is sinful than on any hope for the nearing salvation of the world. The Christian church that was almost completely pacifistic till the time of Constantine was largely inclined to view the world as evil and the result of sin. The "world" that was understood as evil was not, except in extreme cases, the natural or physical world, but the world as a pagan society which manifested itself in various human situations. The most important of those institutions was the state. The demonic origin of the state required Christians to abstain as much as possible from involvement in the functions of the state.¹⁹

Those Christians who in later times imitated the apolitical pacifism of the early church usually agreed with the early Christians that political involvement might easily mean spiritual contamination. Consider a Mennonite response to the emphasis on politics:

...while the Christian has an obligation to his fellow men, his first obligation is necessarily to God. If political activity prevents the discharge of his obligation to God it would better be sacrificed. Decisions and choices would always be wiser if they were determined by the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures, rather than by what seems socially the most useful for the time being. 20

For the Christian political pacifist, on the other hand, retreat from the world is considered calamitous. The Christian's task is to transform the present world into a world more closely approximating the Kingdom of God. This is to be done not simply through the spiritual methods of prayer and witness, but also through programs and strategies based on Christian motivation and on love. In general, Christian political pacifism is based on the proposition that the love ethic of Jesus has value politically as well as individually. Ethics excludes violence (especially on the international level) and proper ethics is proper politics. The application of Christian ethics will lead to a more just and more peaceful world. 21

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20 Herschberger, op. cit., p. 197.

21 An outstanding example of Christian political pacifism in twentieth-century America is A. J. Muste. See, for example, his Non-Violence in an Aggressive World (New York, 1940).
Christian political pacifism differs from Christian apolitical pacifism essentially in the relationship of Christian ethics to politics. Both types of Christian pacifists agree that Christianity demands abstinence from war. The political pacifists want the whole of society to be based on pacifistic Christian principles; the apolitical pacifists, believing society too corrupt to be ruled by Christian principles, urge Christians to abstain from war and from politics. Christian apolitical pacifism is a program for individuals and groups of Christians in the midst of an immoral society; Christian political pacifism is both a program for Christians and a program for society. Political pacifists seek the Christianization of society; apolitical pacifists seek to preserve pure Christianity in an immoral society. Christian political pacifism is closely related to the Social Gospel attempt to build the Kingdom of God on earth; Christian apolitical pacifism is not.

The Fellowship of Reconciliation has come to be the outstanding example of Christian political pacifism in the United States. The basic principles of the FOR are set forth in the leaflet, "That Men May Live" (The very title reflects the hope for success in this world). The first two principles
are sufficient to indicate the orientation of the movement:

(1) They [[the members of FOR] identify with those of every nation, race and religion who are the victims of injustice and exploitation, and seek to develop resources of active nonviolent intervention with which to rescue them from such circumstances.

(2) They work to abolish war and to create a community of concern transcending all national boundaries and selfish interests; as an integral part of that commitment they refuse to participate personally in any war, or to give any sanction they can withhold from physical, moral or psychological preparation for war. 22

In the years under consideration in this chapter (1916-1919), Thomas' pacifism was in full conformity with the political pacifism of the FOR.

As a Christian political pacifist, Thomas believed both that war was contrary to good ethical behavior and that proper Christian ethics could establish peace on earth. War is totally wrong, Thomas thought, totally contrary to Christian ethics, and one may not use such an immoral means even in seeking to bring about a good result: "As a Christian I believe there is a more excellent way which I am bound to seek." 23 Thomas sought to discover methods that, being just

22 Fellowship of Reconciliation Statement of Purpose, revised 1965.

23 Thomas to "Dear Alfred," September 7, 1917 (Thomas Papers).
and Christian in themselves, would accomplish peace on earth
and justice for all. "Is not a steadfast witness to the more
excellent way the highest social service and the only way in
which the nation can be finally led to the light?" 24

It was Thomas' belief, then, not only that war was
contrary to Christian morality (including the Christian
Teaching that the end does not justify the means) but also
that the practice of Christianity would accomplish for society
what war could not. Outstanding witness to the Christian con-
demnation of war was the first step toward establishing a
peaceful world:

I think war will be abolished by the just social,
economic and political organization of mankind and
in no other way. I believe that the attitude of
the conscientious objector will prove to be one very
great factor in arousing men to get rid of the curse
of war and that the conscientious objector is
rendering a very fine sort of social service in his
protest. 25

While traditional Christian apolitical pacifism
looked upon the actions of the state as necessarily un-

24 Thomas to Rev. Henry S. Coffin, June 2, 1917
(Thomas Papers).

25 Thomas to Robert Hunter, August 29, 1917 (Thomas
Papers).
Christian and sinful, Thomas had faith that supreme witness to the Kingdom of God was the obligation of the individual Christian not just for the sake of his own conscience but also as a means of achieving peace and justice in the world. He went so far as to say that "The issue is not merely one of war or peace but of the validity of Christianity." If Christians really believe in the supremacy of the God who is love, they cannot acknowledge that war is the only way to a legitimate goal. "To believe that it is useless to preach the Gospel of the more excellent way is pessimism so profound as to leave us, whatever our professions, without real hope in the world." The Christian must be true to the Kingdom of God by living and working according to the values, ideals, and rules which are its inner essence. By living according to the Kingdom, which to Christians is more than just a future abstraction, a greater similarity between life in present-day earthly society and the Kingdom of God can be achieved.


27 Ibid.

28 Thomas to Robert Hunter, August 29, 1917 (Thomas Papers).
Thomas' pacifism during World War I was a social philosophy that accepted the position that what is good for the individual is good for the state. This is not to be understood, of course, in a capitalistic sense that if each individual pursues his own economic interest the best for all will be the result. Rather Thomas' individualism (if it can be called that) consisted of two principles: first, that the state exists for the sake of the individual, not vice versa; secondly, that what is good for the individual is also proper for the state. 29 The first principle emphasized the supreme dignity of the individual person and the immorality of the coercion of the individual conscience. The second implied both that a noble state consists of noble individuals ("If war brutalizes the individual it cannot enable the state." 30) and that the ethical principles and ideals that are accepted for individuals should also be followed by the nation ("If the Christian would believe that the method of the Cross was the real method of our salvation how could he doubt that the same principle must run through

29 See Thomas to Walter F. Muhlbaech, July 31, 1917 (Thomas Papers).

30 Ibid.
all of life. 31). One can determine the proper activities of the state from an understanding of what Christianity teaches regarding the individual Christian life.

A Fellowship of Reconciliation leaflet dated February 10, 1917, and issued by the Fellowship Committee that included Thomas among its members clearly indicates that the moral individual was the basis of the organization's philosophy:

The method of war, instead of defending, inevitably shatters moral principles. In making the defeat of the enemy its supreme object it subordinates the moral law to military necessity. In its wholesale destruction of men by men, in engendering widespread hatred and distrust; it violates that reverence for personality which lies at the heart of the Christian religion. In demanding absolute obedience to military authority and surrender of the right to act according to conscience, it cuts at the very life root of moral being. However just a cause may be, the method of war is intrinsically evil and therefore self-defeating. 32

The Fellowship Committee argued that evil can only be overcome by good and that this principle needs to be put into practice. The Christian pacifist must contribute to the discovery and employment of means which adequately express in-

31Ibid.

32Fellowship of Reconciliation leaflet, February 10, 1917 (Thomas Papers).
international good will and the method of love. The reorgan-
ization of society -- international and national -- on the
basis of Christian ethics is the only way to achieve peace.
this reorganization is both possible and practical. 33

In a letter written to all the members of the FOR
by Thomas (for the Fellowship Committee) two weeks after the
United States declared war in April, 1917, the emphasis was
on the positive task of the Fellowship's position and role.

"We are no mere anti-war society," Thomas wrote, "but a
fellowship of those who, by the method of love seek the
triumph of justice and the establishment of a social order
based upon the will of God revealed in Christ Jesus." 34

During the war, and even more after the war, those possessed
of the pacifist vision must work for the "substitution of
Christian principles of freedom, cooperation and good-will,
in place of the old political, social and economic theories
of class superiority, ruthless competition, and self-seeking." 35

33 Ibid.

34 Thomas for Fellowship Committee to all members of
FOR, April 23, 1917 (Thomas Papers).

35 Ibid.
During the war Thomas expended much time and effort on behalf of those Americans who chose to be conscientious objectors. To Thomas there was a close relationship between the evil of war and the suppression of individual liberties. Freedom was as important as cooperation among the basic Christian principles that needed to be put into practice in society; war denied both. In a letter to Dr. Pennington in April, 1917, Thomas listed as the first evil of war the giving over of a person's conscience to a supreme authority.

In his letter to members of the FOR he stated: "That members of the Fellowship must at whatever cost to themselves be loyal to their conscience goes without saying." Thomas added (and this is important for realizing what he understood to be the essential Christian ethical principles) that democracy as well as the Kingdom of God would be served by such loyalty. The implication is strong that democracy is an essential element of the Kingdom of God on earth and that

36 Thomas to Dr. Pennington, April 19, 1917 (Thomas Papers).

37 Thomas for Fellowship Committee, op. cit.

38 Ibid.
the social expression of the Christian principle of individual moral freedom is democracy.

As was true of most members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Thomas' pacifism was not total nonresistance. He found the use of force compatible with Christian values in certain times and circumstances; police force and the use of personal physical force in an emergency can be good. A genuine international police force, should one ever be developed, can even be acceptable; war between nations cannot. A police force enforces the law and is "measurably consistent with love to a degree that war cannot be, even when it is undertaken for ends that men think must be noble."39

Two things have been made clear by the foregoing analysis of Thomas' pacifism. First, Thomas was a Christian pacifist. Thomas became a pacifist out of a conviction that the acceptance of war was incompatible with the Christian principles of love, cooperation, and the sanctity of the individual conscience. Secondly, Thomas was a political pacifist. Pacifism was a strategy for world peace as well as a means of maintaining Christian purity. Thomas' goal

39 Thomas to Dr. Pennington, April 19, 1917 (Thomas Papers).
was the end of war in the world; society as well as individual life should be based on cooperation rather than conflict. The ethical good is the political good; programs and strategies based on Christian ethical principles are the only ones that will result in the political achievement of peace.

The Social Gospel nature of Thomas' pacifism is clear. He became a pacifist on the basis of his desire to Christianize society. His was an ethical social philosophy which defined Christian ethics in terms of love, cooperation, and the dignity of the individual and sought political strategies on the basis of those principles. Thomas was a pacifist because he saw war as contrary to the only principles of social behavior that could build a peaceful world. Only pacifism, for Thomas, was in accord with the nature of the Kingdom of God.

3. Civil Libertarianism

In the same year that he joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation (1916), Thomas became active in the American Union Against Militarism. The AUAM had been organized in

40 Thomas, Autobiography, p. 67.
1915 by a group of citizens determined to prevent American participation in the war in Europe. The leaders were for the most part religious pacifists, Socialists, and social workers and included Paul Kellogg and Lillian Wald (social workers), Crystal Eastman and her brother Max Eastman (both Socialists), and El Hollinsworth Wood and Louis Lochner (pacifists). The aims of the AUAM were simple: they wanted to keep the United States out of the war and to do this through opposing the growing preparedness movement. Specifically, the AUAM hoped to persuade Congress to defeat the National Defense Bill and to outlaw profits in the manufacture of armaments.41

The AUAM grew rapidly. By 1916 it had achieved enough recognition to be given opportunity to appear before the House Committee on Military Affairs to protest against the President's National Defense Bill. The National Defense Act was passed in June, but the anti-militarists achieved a small victory in that Congress did not make the provision

for a military draft that President Wilson had requested.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 6-9.}

Once the war was a reality, the American Union Against Militarism quickly declined. A number of the members, though, moved from the dying organization into a new one, the National Civil Liberties Bureau (the name was later changed to the American Civil Liberties Union\footnote{To avoid confusion, I will refer to the organization as the American Civil Liberties Union from the beginning.}). At the beginning and as long as the war lasted, the ACLU was primarily involved in defending the rights of opponents of the war. The decision of many of the leaders of the AUAM to devote themselves to the defense of civil liberties was made under the leadership of Roger Baldwin, who arrived in New York in March, 1917, as a member of the AUAM national directing committee. Baldwin, like Thomas, was a pacifist. He realized that with the coming of the war opponents of war might be persecuted: he insisted that the AUAM's work logically included defense of individual consciences during the war: "Having created conscientious objectors to war,
we ought to stand by them." Thomas worked closely with Baldwin in the organization and work of the ACLU.

The transition from the AUAM to the ACLU was not a radical one for Thomas. Believing as he did that pacifists and other opponents of war were the prophets of a more peaceful tomorrow, it was natural to want to help defend these prophets from government prosecution. Believing as he did that one of the evils of war was the violation of individual conscience, it followed that, even in wartime, he would want to reduce the extent of this evil. Believing as he did that the government should operate on the basis of Christian principles, he wanted the government to accept the Christian belief in the supremacy of the individual conscience. Thomas' opposition to war and his defense of civil liberties were closely related.

In a letter to the *New Republic* in May, 1917, Thomas argued that the individual non-conformist must be protected from government coercion for the sake of society as a whole.

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45 See, for example, Thomas to Dr. Pennington, April 19, 1917 (Thomas Papers).
Humanitarians, workers in the social service, child welfare devotees, Tolstoians, radical educators—these constitute the vanguard of a revised and spiritually humanized world state. If civilization were to plan the utter wreckage of its most precious (because most consecrated) values, it could do no better than empower the mechanized state with the authority to brutalize and degrade all its visionaries. 46

"Relics" are to be considered, according to Thomas, as the possible forerunners of a better future. No progress can be made toward that brighter future if everyone must accept the majority position of the present.

In defending the right of the conscientious objector to recognition and respect for his position, Thomas argued that the question was not whether men who seek to overcome evil by means other than active participation in war are right. The real question is: "Can a majority attempt to coerce the individual conscience in this vital matter?" 47

The position adopted by the ACLU at its organization in 1917 was that anyone had the right to advocate any doctrine, however unpopular. 48 Though Thomas and the ACLU were involved

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during the war primarily with defending conscientious objects and other opponents of the war (with whose position they agreed), the principle for the defense of civil liberties was not the correctness of the position taken by the non-conformist but the inviolability of the individual conscience and the necessity for non-conformity if society is to move forward.

Thomas’ conviction that freedom of conscience is both a good in itself and a good for society is another example of his understanding that what is good for the individual is good for society, that what Christianity advocates on the individual level should also be advocated on the social level. The better world is achieved, the Kingdom of God is brought to a fuller realization, through the application of Christianity to all of society.

Thomas’ concern for freedom was profound. As has already been pointed out in the discussion of his pacifism, his objection to war was partially based on the fact that war suppressed freedom. His movement toward socialism also involved considerations of freedom. In the fall of 1917 he campaigned for Morris Hillquit, the Socialist Party candidate for Mayor of New York City. In the letter to Hillquit
in which he offered his support, the defense of freedom was mentioned as one of the reasons for his decision to vote for a Socialist:

I am especially concerned because in this war for democracy, autocracy is growing so fast. I do not believe that democracy is a garment that can be taken off and put in moth balls for future use or that you can secure democratic ends by Prussian methods of which the latest example is the legislation which makes the Postmaster General judge of what the American people shall read. A vote for you, is to protest against this sort of tyranny. 49

Years later Thomas recalled that he had become a civil libertarian before he became a Socialist and that he turned to democratic socialism because "I saw in its basis for freedom which the acquisitive society did not provide." 50 Thomas' memory appears completely accurate. Civil Liberties and democracy were of utmost importance to him at the very beginning of American involvement in the war; he did not make the final decision to join the Socialist Party until the end of the war.

Thomas' work on behalf of conscientious objectors included his first book, The Conscientious Objector in

49 Thomas to Morris Hillquit, October 2, 1917 (Thomas Papers).
50 Thomas, The Test of Freedom (New York, 1934).
America. Though not published till 1923, it was written very shortly after the war and reflects his basic understanding of freedom during the period under consideration. In The Conscientious Objector in America, the case for the C.O. is based on the two notions that have already been presented as essential to Thomas' defense of civil liberties: the supremacy of the individual conscience and the challenge to build a better society that is presented by conscientious non-conformists.

The state has "not the right to conscript men's lives for service wholly opposed to their convictions."51 One of the causes of the calamity of war is the belief in the sovereignty of the common good. Men's affairs are in sad plight if society is to be served by compelling the individual to be true to his neighbors by being untrue to himself. A free society can only be the result of free individuals.52

By refusing to conform, conscientious objectors are making a real contribution to society. Demonstrably, "heresy


52 Ibid., pp. 8-9.
has always been the growing point of society. "53 Social heresy and civil disobedience present a type of challenge to the basic ideas of men and to their instinctive obedience to a philosophy of war and injustice that can be equalled in few other instances. If the day of true freedom ever comes, when society will be a fellowship of free men, "not the least of the prophets and pioneers of that dawning will be the absolutists of 1918 who, manacled to the bars of their dark cells like wild beasts, endured the interminable procession of the hours in solitary confinement."54 Freedom and dissent were important elements in Thomas’ social philosophy during the period of the First World War. He believed very strongly that the essence of a free society is the supremacy of the individual conscience which Christianity teaches. Society is moved toward the ideals of freedom and brotherhood through the dissent and witness of those who insist, despite persecution, that they must live according to their consciences. One should not underestimate the power of dissent and witness in the making

53 Ibid., p. 9.
54 Ibid., p. 292.
of a better society.

Thomas' civil libertarianism was the political expression of his Social Gospel Christianity. It followed directly from two elements that were central to his religious thought: first, that society should function according to Christian ethical principles; secondly, that one of the most important Christian ethical principles is that the individual and his conscience are of supreme value.

4. Socialism

On October 18, 1918, Norman Thomas mailed his application for membership in the Socialist Party. Thomas took this action because, he said, he was convinced that radicals ought to stand up and be counted and because, "I believe in the necessity of establishing a cooperative commonwealth and the abolition of our present unjust economic institutions and class distinctions based thereon."

Thomas' earlier social philosophy had been a type of progressivism. During his undergraduate days at Princeton the professor who made the deepest impression upon him was...

55 Thomas to Alexander Trachtenberg, October 28, 1918 (Thomas Papers).
Woodrow Wilson; he attempted to take every course that Wilson offered. One of the other courses that impressed Thomas at the time was one on socialism which he, in later memories, entitled "Why Socialism Ain't So." After graduation, Thomas toyed with the idea of writing a book arguing the advantages of reformed capitalism over socialism.

Thomas was not an instant convert to socialism because of one event, one book, or one man. He became a socialist gradually. Two things, he often remarked in later life, made him a socialist. The first was his personal experience in the poverty-stricken sections of New York City, which gradually convinced him that the various reforms possible under capitalism were not sufficient; the second was the World War which he came to see as an imperialist struggle to be understood in terms of the socialist analysis. An important influence on his coming to the socialist position on the war was H. N. Brailford's War of Steel and Gold.

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56 Seidler, op. cit., pp. 8-10.  
57 Ibid., p. 10  
58 Ibid.  
The war played as important a part in Thomas' developing socialism as it had in regard to his pacifism and civil libertarianism. In his Autobiography he notes that he is not sure that he would have become a member of the Socialist Party if it had not been for the war, though he thought there was a great probability that he would have become a socialist (small 's') even if the war had not so changed his world. 60

It was the opposition of the Socialist Party to America's entry into World War I which particularly gained Thomas' respect for the Party as a party. 61

In addition to his conviction that the capitalistic system cannot solve the problems of poverty and that it inspires the imperialism responsible for the frightful calamity of war, a third factor influenced Thomas' decision to join the Socialist Party. As was pointed out in the previous section of this chapter, he was attracted to democratic socialism partly because of his desire to preserve and expand civil liberties and democracy. Yet the question of liberty worked both ways; it was largely responsible for Thomas'...
considerable hesitation before joining the Party. Less than a month before he made his decision to apply for membership, he was still hesitating despite general sympathy with the party's economic and political program.

What thus deterred me from membership in the party is a fear of its tendency to trust to coercion of the individual mind and conscience rather than persuasion. The ultimate values in the world are those of personality, and no theory of the state, whether socialistic or capitalistic, is valid, which makes it master not servant of man. 62

Thomas added that the necessity for freedom for the individual was becoming increasingly recognized in the Party. 63

Within a month he reached the definite conclusion that, though he might have to fight for full freedom within the Party, he should join the Party since the overall outlook for freedom was much better under socialism than under capitalism. He joined the Socialist Party, characteristically emphasizing in his application his "profound faith that the new world we desire must depend upon freedom and

62 Thomas to Mrs. Anne G. Brush, September 24, 1918 (Thomas Papers).
63 Ibid.
fellowship rather than upon any sort of coercion whatsoever. 64

One of the men who influenced Thomas toward socialism was Morris Hillquit. The famous debate between Hillquit and Father Ryan on socialism versus capitalism was read with the conviction (perhaps for the first time for Thomas) that the Socialist had gotten the better of the argument. 65 But the man who was more responsible than any other individual for Thomas' socialism was, as has already been seen, Walter Rauschenbusch: "Insofar as any one man or any one book, or series of books, made me a Socialist, it was probably Walter Rauschenbusch and his writings." 66

Thomas came to socialism and to the Socialist Party under ethical compulsions. He was convinced that the problems of poverty and war were the results of inadequate ethical orientations. Convinced that the values he held important—brotherhood, justice, freedom—were expressed much

64 Thomas to Alexander Trachtenberg, October 18, 1918 (Thomas Papers).

65 See Thomas, Autobiography, p. 64.

more adequately in socialism than in capitalism, he was drawn to join the Party and fight for the spread of Socialist values and institutions.67

In Thomas' judgment, the present social order contradicted the spirit of Christ. "My point," he wrote in 1917, "is not that some part of our present system is opposed to Christ's teachings but that in its fundamental bases it is wrong."68 The present system is immoral; it is not based on justice, love, cooperation, and good will. On the contrary, men are bound to a system that is based on strife and urges acceptance of an each-man-for-himself philosophy. The practice of Christian ethics is impossible in the present social order and it is the obligation of Christians to strive to bring about a new social order and a new economic order based on cooperation and good will rather than on competition. A social order based on cooperation is also the hope of the Socialist Party. Though the Party is not perfect, "it has


68Thomas to Dr. William C. Covert, April 6, 1917 (Thomas Papers).
more idealism than any party I know of." 69

In outlining to Christians the tasks that they should be undertaking in the present situation, Thomas emphasized the importance of seeking to establish the Kingdom of God through the application of Christian principles to society. Though the present social order has already been liberalized and enriched to a limited extent by the Spirit of Christ, still society, "in the fundamental principles of self-seeking, competition and strife whose fruits are seen in war and in the hideous wastes of our civilization ... is the denial of His spirit." 70 Bringing the spirit of Christ to bear upon conditions of fundamental injustice is the task of Christians today. "Christ's religion is profoundly revolutionary, and none the less so because the instrument He would have us use is love and not hate." 71

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69 Thomas to "My Dear Mother," November 2, 1917 (Thomas Papers); see also Thomas to "Dear Gilbert," no date (Thomas Papers).

70 Thomas, "The Church and Industrial Populations," 1917 (Thomas Papers).

71 Thomas, "Six Years in Little Italy," The Assembly Herald (March, 1918), 151.
Thomas' socialism was profoundly Christian. The principle on which to build a just and enduring civilization is Jesus' principle of brotherhood. It is both good ethics and good economics to realize that the collective emancipation of men cannot be achieved under the present competitive system. In the present political picture, it is the labor movement and the Socialist Party that are attempting to defeat the evils of capitalism and establish the principle of brotherhood. The Christian should support these movements.

The Christian cannot be neutral. To say that "the church ideally takes no side in the conflict between capital and labor; it is a moral arbiter standing for eternal principles of right," may sound well but is essentially fallacious. It is precisely the right... which the present capitalistic system denies. We cannot in a world of stern reality preach a sentimental fellowship unless we desire the abolition of a system which divides men into inevitably antagonistic classes, and fans the fires of race hatred. 72

Thomasthe decision to work for socialism within the organization of the Socialist Party of America should not be understood as a denial of either the ethical nature of his politics or of the Christian nature of his socialism. Though the Party was largely Marxist, it had always included a

72 Thomas, "Can a Christian Be Neutral?" The World Tomorrow, III (June, 1920), 171.
sizable number of non-Marxist ethical Socialists. It is useful to consider briefly some aspects of the historical development of American socialism in order to understand fully Thomas' decision to join the Socialist Party.

In the late 1880's and early 1890's an important type of socialist literature appeared in America, best exemplified by the popular writings of Laurence Gronlund, Edward Bellamy, and William Dean Howells. Gronlund's *Cooperative Commonwealth*, Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and Howells' *A Traveler from Altruria* were descriptions of the cooperative commonwealth that merged scientific socialism and native American idealism. The work of these three men went far toward making socialism respectable in America.73

*Looking Backward* was the most popular of these writings and it was immensely popular. More copies of *Looking Backward* were sold by the end of the century than of any other American novel except *Ben-Hur* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

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The novel was pervaded with a sense of urgency and immediacy and appealed greatly to humanitarian minded Americans immediately and well into the twentieth century.

Three outstanding personalities, Charles Beard, John Dewey, and Edward Weeks, independently making a list of the twenty-five most influential books published since 1885, all put Bellamy's work in the second place; Karl Marx's Das Kapital being in the first.

The socialist literature represented by Gronlund, Bellamy, and Howells reflected the influence of Marxist socialism. Gronlund was a long-time member of the Socialist Labor Party (the Marxist party which had been founded in the 1870's) and his Cooperative Commonwealth provided the intellectual foundation for both Bellamy and Howells. These apostles of socialism adopted the Marxian understanding that capitalism, understood scientifically, was evolving inevitably into the highest form of civilization, the socialist commonwealth.

But these men were not Marxists:

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74 Erich Fromm, "Foreword," to Bellamy, op. cit., p. v.

75 Ibid.

The prospect of class conflict appalled them. If the proletariat won their sympathy it was not as heroes but as victims. On principle they abhorred an ethic that exalted class interest as much as one that exalted individual interest. They looked to the disinterested idealists of America -- the educated, the professionals, the men of conscience and hope, in short, the enlightened middle class -- to be the agents of transition and the leaders of the new order. The America they envisioned was to embody a fundamental shift in values, away from property, conflict, selfishness, and domination, and toward the organic solidarity of man and man, man and society, man and work, toward the unchallenged supremacy of art and science and leisure over economics.77

Bellamyite socialism was very similar to the Christian Socialism of the Social Gospel movement that was considered in the previous chapter. Both were primarily educational movements, advocating a gradual, peaceful transition to socialism, to be accomplished through the changing of society's values. Though incorporating some of the Marxist analysis, the socialism of Looking Backward and other such writings remained essentially idealistic.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the two major socialist political parties in the United States were the Socialist Labor Party and the Social Democratic Party of

77Ibid., p. 10.
America. The Socialist Labor Party was at this time headed by Daniel De Leon, an orthodox Marxist. Under De Leon’s leadership, the SLP had scrapped all specific resolutions and planks, what is known in socialism as "immediate demands," and retained only the statement of principles. Since the condition for joining the SLP was agreement to a specific doctrinal view, the party was becoming exclusively Marxist. The Social Democratic Party, a newer, largely mid-West socialist political party, was headed by the popular labor leader Eugene Debs and by Victor Berger of Milwaukee. The Social Democrats insisted upon immediate reforms as well as ultimate socialism and thus included many varieties of socialists and dissidents.  

In 1901, the Socialist Party of America came into being, the result of the fusion of the Social Democratic Party and a faction (really the majority) of the SocialistParty.

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78 For socialist politics at the turn of the century, see Quint, op. cit.; Daniel Bell, Marxian Socialism in the United States (Princeton, 1967); David Shannon, The Socialist Party of America (New York, 1955); Morris Hillquit, History of Socialism in the United States (New York, 1965; reprint of 1901 edition).
Labor Party which, under the leadership of Morris Hillquit, split with De Leon. The Socialist Party took over the platform of the Social Democrats virtually intact and reflected the Social Democratic Party's inclusion of a variety of different philosophies. In the words of Daniel Bell, the party that was composed of everything from Marxists to vegetarians was "as unstable a compound as was ever mixed in the modern history of political chemistry." The socialism of the party platform was largely scientific, but the whole socialist movement was given its impact by the moral indignation brought about by the fact of poverty and by the evangelical promise of a better world. Most of the delegates to the first Socialist Party convention had only the haziest intellectual understanding of Marxism. Their antimperialism owed more to Bellamy than to Marx.

The Socialist Party grew rapidly in the first decade of the twentieth century, incorporating as it did many different strains of social criticism. Many, perhaps most, of

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79 Bell, op. cit., p. 45.
80 Ibid.
81 Shannon, op. cit., p. 3.
the new Socialists "had joined the party because capitalism
had offended their Judeo-Christian ethics, rather than because
of any exposure to dialectical materialism." Thus many
Socialists were Christian socialists even though they may
have rebelled against religious orthodoxy as well as against
political and economic orthodoxy. They may not have been
church members, but lack of religious orthodoxy does not
make one less Christian in ethics. "One does not have to
reject the Sermon on the Mount when he rejects organized
religion."83

The Socialist Party, despite its Marxist rhetoric,
was essentially moderate. It tended to be idealistic and
closer in spirit to the Christian Socialists and the
Bellamy-style Nationalist Clubs than to the Socialist Labor
Party of DeLeon. "It was an American Party in style and in
substance, espousing a cause rooted in the American tradi-
tion and made up mostly of American-born members and lead-
ers."84 Debs' statement that "I am for Socialism because

82 Ibid., p. 59.
83 Ibid.
84 Fried, op. cit., p. 12.
I am for humanity, epitomized the spirit of the Socialist Party of America.

The Socialist Party that was forced to take a stand on the war after the outbreak of fighting in Europe in 1914 was, thus, a composite of a number of different approaches to socialism. Revolutionary Marxists shared the Party with Christian socialists who had come to see the necessity for a socialist political party and had found the Socialist Party acceptably idealistic and non-revolutionary; the ethical and Marxist strands of American socialism both found a home in the Socialist Party before the First World War. Though one might suspect that the idealist socialists learned the importance of political activity from Marxists and that the Marxists, in turn, de-emphasized the revolutionary character of Marxism because of the idealists, still the Socialist Party did not mean a fusing of the various points of view. Rather, it was a party in which each of the various types of socialists could work for his own understanding of the co-operative commonwealth.

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85 Debs quoted in *ibid.*, p. 379.

86 See, for example, James Weinstein, *The Decline of American Socialism 1912-1925* (New York, 1967), first chapter.
When the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party met in August, 1914, to issue a statement on the European war, it neglected (perhaps from the surprise and confusion that Socialists were thrown into by the war) to write its proclamation on the basis of the Marxist theory of capitalistic imperialism as the cause of war and presented a position that could have been accepted by almost any peace group: the war is a "crude, savage, and unsatisfactory method of settling real and imaginary differences between nations, and destructive of the ideals of brotherhood and humanity to which the international Socialist movement is dedicated." 87

Between 1914 and 1917 the Socialist Party opposed all programs that they thought would lead to American intervention in the European war. In the spring of 1917, when it became evident that the United States was going to war, a meeting of the National Executive Committee was called for St. Louis. On April 7, 1917, the day after Congress passed the Declaration of War, the Socialist Party issued what has become known as the St. Louis Manifesto. The Manifesto

87Quoted by Shannon, op. cit., p. 82.
reaffirms the Socialist opposition to the war:

The Socialist Party of the United States, in the present grave crisis, solemnly reaffirms its allegiance to the principle of international and working-class solidarity the world over, and proclaims its unalterable opposition to the war just declared by the Government of the United States. 88

It was in the Socialist Party of America, especially in its opposition to the war and in its defense of the principle of internationalism, that Thomas found the best political expression of his Christian philosophy. Far from being a denial of his political idealism, Thomas' decision to become a member of the Socialist Party of America was fully in keeping with his philosophy, given the idealist dimensions of the Party and the earlier support given to it by Christian socialists. For a significant number of members of the Socialist Party, socialism was fundamentally idealistic and religious in character. Thomas' decision to join the Party added to this number.

The Bolshevik revolution in Russia had a profound influence on socialism in America. It was an important factor in the 1919 split of the Socialist Party into three parts.

88 Found in Fried, op. cit. p. 521.
the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the Communist Labor Party. The last two were both, in a sense, versions of an American Bolshevism.  

Thomas remained in the Socialist Party. He was not unsympathetic with the Russian Revolution. He had, in fact, lent his home for a pro-Soviet meeting in 1919. He was favorably impressed, for example, with Bolshevism's insistence on "the democratization of industry and expropriation of landlords." Yet Thomas was opposed to any attempt to transport the Russian revolution to the United States. He was vehemently opposed to the denial of civil liberties in Bolshevik Russia:

Men cannot justify the coercion of personality by military conscription by calling the new idol the proletariat instead of the state.... [We] are unalterably persuaded that if the Bolshevik power can live on no other basis then by the suppression of discussion its days are numbered.... [We] are persuaded of one firm truth, that if the workers of the world


90Ibid.

91Thomas, "What is Bolshevism?" The World Tomorrow, II (February, 1919), 37.
have set before their eyes, the ideals of freedom and brotherhood the last way to attain their goal is by the road of dictatorship, proletarian or otherwise.\textsuperscript{92}

The Communists, Thomas thought, were more obsessed with the proletarian dictatorship and the revolution than they were with socialism. The main difference between democratic socialists and Communists, he wrote later, was the difference of means.\textsuperscript{93} Thomas was convinced that the only morally justifiable means and the only means that could accomplish the desired end were democratic means. As he wrote in his Autobiography: "It is hard to overestimate the harm done to socialist ideals by this communist substitution of Machiavelli for Marx as a chief ideological or spiritual leader."\textsuperscript{94} For Thomas, only democratic means could establish a democratic Kingdom.

The nature of Norman Thomas' early socialism is clear. He was convinced that capitalism, not being based on cooperation and love, was contrary to the spirit of Chris-

\textsuperscript{92}Ibid., pp. 38-39.


\textsuperscript{94}Thomas, \textit{Autobiography}, p. 233.
tianity. The fact that life in society was so filled with poverty, injustice, and war was the result of being based on the wrong principles. Christianity taught the proper basis for a good life: if Christians attempted to develop a society that is based on Christian principles, they would construct a socialist society and see the end of most of the problems of poverty, injustice, tyranny, and war. Since it was necessary to work politically for the establishment of a society based on brotherhood and good will and since the Socialist Party came the closest of all political parties to expressing Christian idealism and to working for the Christian goal, Thomas joined the Socialist Party and sided with the "old" Party in the split of 1919.

5. Christianity and Radical Politics

In January, 1918, a new monthly journal began publication with Norman Thomas as editor. The journal, *The World Tomorrow*, quickly became the outstanding American periodical devoted to Christian pacifism and Christian radicalism.

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95The journal was originally named *The New World*. The name was changed after a couple months when it was discovered that a mid-Western paper already had that name. I will refer to Thomas' journal consistently as *The World Tomorrow*. 
A consideration of *The World Tomorrow* and especially of Thomas' own articles in the journal in the years 1918 and 1919 will serve to highlight the basic elements of Thomas' social philosophy at the time that he became a member of the Socialist Party.

It is significant, first of all, that the journal was named *The World Tomorrow*. The subtitle was even more significant: "A Journal Looking Toward a Christian World." The editors of *The World Tomorrow* hoped to contribute to the Christianization of society. The operative belief was that society, including international society, should and could be organized on the basis of Christian ethics. An editorial in the very first issue stated: "Our business -- to state it in very general terms -- is to establish the principle and practice of cooperation both within and between communities in place of the competitive spirit which has chiefly determined the course of the world." 96

A review of Walter Rauschenbusch's great work, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, which appeared in the April, 1918, issue, can be considered as an example of the social

The philosophy of the Social Gospel. The reviewer, identified only by the initials J. W. D., strongly praised Rauschenbusch for pointing out clearly that the Social Gospel insists upon both the possibility and the necessity of correcting the social ills of mankind. Certainly the salvation of the individual is an essential part of the Social Gospel, but salvation confined to the individual is imperfect and only partly effective. Sin, too, is to be understood socially:

The old definition of sin as selfishness is accepted, but instead of regarding it as a private transaction between the sinner and God, the Social Gospel demands that the interests of God and humanity be identified as Jesus identified them. Man’s selfishness stands out most clearly, not in heresies and private sin, but in his readiness to thwart the progress of fraternity, cooperation and love because such progress endangers his own social, economic or political privileges.

In the May, 1918, issue the editors published a letter from a participant at a conference of Christians and Socialists. The correspondent, Alexander Richander, noted that Christians and Socialists have much in common. Specifically,

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98 Ibid.
they are in complete agreement that a call for universal brotherhood is an appeal to what is best in man. The true Christian can best serve God by participating in a Socialist movement that hastens the day of a brotherly society. The one difficulty that might stop radical Christians from becoming actively involved with non-Christian Socialists is the doctrine of the class struggle. Certainly the preaching of a class struggle would seem contrary to Jesus' doctrine of love. The difficulty is not a real one, however. The radical does not really advocate class hatred; he merely points out that under the present system of capitalism there is an opposition of interest between the owners and the workers. Thus the obligation of the true Christian to support the Socialist movement is not annulled by the doctrine of class conflict.99 This letter indicates, once again, that radical Christians found the Socialist Party perfectly compatible with their idealism.

Turning from the general nature of The World Tomorrow to the specific ideas Thomas himself championed in

The journal, one is immediately struck by his refusal to accept a dualistic ethics. A Christian, Thomas insists, cannot acknowledge that states should operate on the basis of a different type of ethics from that of individuals. "States are made up of men; I am not one person as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, and another as the obedient soldier of the state. I cannot love my enemy as a Christian and bayonet him as a soldier and keep within reasonable distance of reality." 100 If the state requires something that is contrary to the ethics of the Kingdom of God, the true Christian must refuse the state. 101

The argument that one must make a practical choice of the lesser of two evils leaves Thomas as completely unmoved as the dual-ethics approach. To those who agree that war with Germany is the necessary practical choice since the only alternative is passive acquiescence in Prussian tyranny, Thomas replies: "The practical force of this argument is very great, but surely it is not a conquering religion which..."

100 Thomas, "What of the Church," The World Tomorrow, 1 (February, 1918), 44.
101 Ibid.
at such a crisis speaks only of a choice between evils."\textsuperscript{102}

True Christian faith is incompatible with the lesser-evil approach to life: "Of what value is our faith if our God is either so powerless that we must serve Him and His causes by the devil's means of war, or so lacking in love that he desires such methods of salvation."\textsuperscript{103}

The extent to which Thomas' social thought is based on Christian faith is clearly brought to the attention of the reader of \textit{The World Tomorrow}. He speaks, for example, of the clear principle that "There is a moral government of the universe which tolerates no exceptions to its mighty rule."\textsuperscript{104} Men shall reap what they sow. The nature of this moral power that rules the universe, the nature of this God, is to be understood in terms of Jesus' life and teachings. In Jesus one can find the supreme revelation of God and of God's way of overcoming evil. The way of Jesus is the only way that does not violate the will of God for man and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{102}Ibid., p. 45.
\item \textsuperscript{103}Ibid., p. 46. See also Thomas, "Is Violence the Way?" \textit{The World Tomorrow}, II (May, 1919), p. 120
\item \textsuperscript{104}Thomas, "The Acid Test of Our Democracy," \textit{The World Tomorrow}, I (September, 1918), 226.
\end{itemize}
society. Nations and societies cannot expect even earthly success if they attempt to overcome evil by means other than those taught by Jesus.\textsuperscript{105}

One of the leading principles of Thomas' social ethics is the principle that evil cannot be overcome except by good, that the end does not justify the means:

Is not the supremely revolutionary character of true Christianity this -- that not only does it demand a new social structure built on other foundations than those which have crumbled beneath us, but that it requires the abandonment of the age-long attempt to secure justice by hate or establish peace by violence. It confidently proclaims the existence of a more excellent way. Dare we follow that way for the salvation of mankind?\textsuperscript{106}

In addition to the relationship of means to ends, Thomas noted three principles of Jesus that are to be the basis for the reconstruction of society.

The first of the principles Thomas accepted is stated thus: "The inestimable value of the individual and the right of the individual to the fullest development of..."
personality."107 This was at the basis of Thomas' passionate concern for individual freedom.

The second principle reads: "Serve the supreme motive of humanity and the test of human achievement."108 The fullness of human life, individual and social, is to be achieved through the practice of unselfishness. This position is related, of course, to Thomas' opposition to capitalistic competition for profit.

The final principle is: "The inescapable responsibility of the individual for complete devotion to the welfare of society of all that he has and all that he is to the end of establishing a genuine human brotherhood."109 This means that the true follower of Jesus Christ must be involved in the creation of a better society and, taken together with the first two principles, means that the Christian must work for the establishment of democratic socialism (Democracy stresses the freedom of the individual; socialism


108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.
is an economic order that is unselfish). For Thomas, then, the principles of Jesus require that one strive for the establishment of democratic socialism through means that are not evil and self-defeating.

Thomas was a Christian political radical. Both the political goals and the political means were determined by the principles of Christianity. Christianity taught that society was to be restructured in the form of an international democratic socialism; Christianity also taught that this goal of peace, freedom, and justice could only be accomplished through the proper Christian means. In the period of World War I, Norman Thomas entered politics in pursuit of the Kingdom of God.
THOMAS - SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER

1. Introduction

Beginning in 1938 Norman Thomas was the Socialist Party candidate for the presidency of the United States in six successive campaigns. This chapter is a study of Thomas’ social philosophy in the years that began with his rise to leadership in the Party. An analysis of Thomas’ thinking, it is argued, demonstrates that Thomas continued to base his politics on Social Gospel ethics throughout the rest of his life.

There is clear evidence that Thomas’ ideas did change somewhat from his earlier Christian social philosophy as the years went by. He found it intellectually necessary to abandon the Christian theological framework that had supported his earlier political views and, because of this change in his religious views, he became less uncompromising. His pacifism became less absolute and he accepted the political necessity of choosing the lesser evil at times. Nevertheless, the Christian ethical principles that he had
applied to society in his Christian days were not abandoned later in life. To put it differently, Thomas could no longer accept a God of power and love but he held to the ethics of Jesus; philosophically, he rejected Christianity while ethically he remained a Christian. The very same ethical ideals of love, brotherhood, and individual dignity that had earlier brought Thomas into politics continued to be the underlying basis for his positions on war and peace, on freedom and dissent, and on socialism. The desire for a society based on cooperation and respect for the individual continued to determine the nature of his social programs.

The continuing religious influence on Thomas' political thought is further demonstrated by the extent to which he differed from those whose approach was not inspired by the Social Gospel: political "realists" (Niebuhr), pragmatic politicians (Roosevelt), and scientific socialists (Marx). Thomas' mature thought retained most of his Social Gospel' approach to politics. Thomas remained convinced that the ethical ideals of cooperation and justice demanded that the economic organization of society be socialistic. He never abandoned the conviction that good ethics makes good economics and good politics. As a Socialist politician,
Thomas did recognize the necessity of choosing the lesser of evil at times. As this chapter demonstrates, however, the lesser of the lesser evil simply qualified Thomas' Social Gospel approach to politics; it did not bring it to an end.

2. Thomas and Christianity

The Socialist Party in 1928 was very weak and disorganized. It had emerged from the war and the persecutions of the war alive but much weaker than it had been before. The Socialist press had been severely hurt; the hostility of large segments of the American people was greater than ever. The post-war "red scare" increased this hostility.¹

The Socialist movement had suffered from internal divisions as well as from government persecution. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia had inspired a new revolutionary brand of socialism in the United States. The split of 1919, when the old membership threw out the revolutionaries to prevent the leftists from taking over the organization, was a major one.²


The "return-to-normalcy" atmosphere of the early 1920's in America did nothing to encourage a new influx of Socialist members. Party membership continued to decline (the number of dues-paying Socialists dropped from 26,766 in 1920 to 11,277 in 1921). The Socialist Party in the 1920's showed very little of the promise that it had held in the decade before the war.

The war, a hostile administration in Washington with little regard for civil liberties, and a popular hysteria had all but killed the Socialist movement. The relative prosperity of the 1920's hindered the development of new converts. Furthermore, the movement had lost much of its zeal to the Communists, who now attracted young rebels.

The attempt of the Socialist Party to help forge a coalition third party in 1924 and the extent to which it campaigned for the election of LaFollette left its own organization weak in many parts of the country. By the middle of the decade the Party had already become the weak movement it would remain during the long years of Thomas' leadership. In the words of historian James Weinstein, "by the mid-1920's the socialist movement in the United States had developed

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3Shannon, op. cit., p. 163.

4Ibid., p. 164.
most of the characteristics it possessed in the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's.\textsuperscript{5}

When Thomas became the candidate of the Socialist Party for the presidency of the United States in 1928, he became the chief representative of a weak, disorganized movement. The country was enjoying a period of prosperity under capitalism and the climate of opinion was not a good one for an anti-capitalist party. Yet, under the leadership of Thomas, "the Socialist Party ceased to decline and began slowly to rebuild itself. Thanks to Thomas' vigor, the Socialist Party was in a fairly good position to exploit the advantage that came to it in the economic crash of late 1929.\textsuperscript{6}

The decade between the end of the war in 1918 and Thomas' first presidential campaign was not only the decade of his rise to leadership in the Socialist Party; it was also the decade during which he abandoned Christianity as a satisfactory explanation of the universe. The man who carried the campaign banner of the Socialists so vigorously

\textsuperscript{5}Weinstein, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 233.

\textsuperscript{6}Shannon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 189.
from 1928 on did so as an ex-Christian.

As a Christian, Thomas had held that God, the moral authority of the universe, would bring about the best results for men if they would just use his methods and follow his ethical principles. Gradually, the problem of evil weakened Thomas' belief in a God who intervened in a world to defend those in the right. "The thing that I craved was assurance not only of a God defined as 'a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness,' but of the concern of that God for us men and His capacity to vindicate faith in love as supreme in the universe." 7 He did not find that assurance; he came instead to the conclusion that the universe is "amoral, indifferent to man and his hopes and fears." 8

The essential nature of Thomas' movement away from Christian belief is well expressed by Fleishman:

"In the war and its aftermath Thomas could find little evidence of the God who was love. Although he argued that man's wickedness and stupidity, not God's, was responsible for the unhappy world of 1920, he could not help but ask, "Has a God of love no

7 Ibid., p. 269.
8 Ibid., p. 265.
responsibility for the weakness of the men he had made?" And thus, slowly but surely, Thomas lost faith in a God who was at once power and love; with it necessarily went his uncompromising religious pacifism, although by no means his hatred of war. 9

Thomas' Christian understanding of a moral universe and of a God worthy of man's love did not survive his growing realization of the extent of human evil and weakness.

Thomas always considered religion to be primarily concerned with the relation of man to the universe. "The problem of the existence and nature of God is at the heart of it." 10 Ethics and religion are separable. Thomas felt it necessary to give up Christianity because he could no longer accept what he thought was at the heart of Christianity -- faith in a loving and powerful God and in a moral universe. Thomas' decision regarding Christianity did not greatly affect his ethics, however. In fact, the extent to which the problem of evil was responsible for his rejection of Christianity indicates that, in large part, he rejected Christianity because of his ethics. Writing on the Sunday after VJ Day in 1945, he asked himself the question: "Why


not, then, church? Because if God be omnipotent power, I cannot praise His ordering of this war-cursed world. If He be love, how can I give Him thanks for the triumph of amoral force? 11

The ethical principles that Thomas continued to accept after his rejection of the Christian God of power and love were Christian ethical principles. The extent to which this is true of his social thought will be indicated throughout this chapter. Thomas' concluding statement in his Autobiography is the clearest acknowledgment of the source of his later ethics:

I find especial value in the gospel record of Jesus of Nazareth, and in his ethics inspiration to the highest achievements in human fellowship. I wish that with equal confidence I could accept his faith in a God like him. But even without it, I can at least strive to make my own Socrates' assurance to Glauc: 12

In heaven there is laid up a pattern of such a city, and he who desires may behold this, and beholding, govern himself accordingly. But whether there is or ever will be such a one is of no importance to him, for he will act according to the laws of that city and no other. 12


12 Ibid., p. 278.
While Thomas had earlier argued that there is "a moral order in the universe against which nations transgress at their peril," he was now convinced that the universe was amoral. He no longer believed in transcendent support for the good. Thomas wrote in the margin of his Autobiography that there is a Power in the universe that we may call God, but the question is how far he works for righteousness. Men must accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions; they cannot simply do what is right and leave the rest to the Lord.

Thomas' support of the ethics of Jesus suggests, however, that a more practical outlook on social action did not mean, for him, that the end justifies the means. Rather, the approach that is most successful in producing good results is adherence to the principle that good means produce good results. To achieve the best practical consequences, one must act in an ethically proper way. This, at any rate, is the kind of thinking that appears to be involved in Thomas' continued acceptance of the ethical teachings of Jesus.


Thomas’ rejection of Christianity did not involve, it would seem, the rejection of the ethics of the Kingdom that was the basis of his earlier social philosophy. An examination of his thought in the years after he rejected Christianity will indicate the extent to which his social ideas continued to reflect Social Gospel ethics.

3. Peace and War

In Norman Thomas’ very last book, he noted that his fifty years of political speaking and writing began and ended with the issue of war at the forefront and with his opposition to the wars of his nation: World War I in 1917, the Vietnam War in 1967. 15 It seems altogether fitting that Thomas’ political career began and ended with the war-peace issue; it was also his primary concern for most of the intervening years.” As he wrote in his Autobiography, “war has been the principle preoccupation of most of my mature years; to help to banish it from the world, or at least to keep my country from involvement in it, my fondest ambition.” 16

Much of Thomas' life was devoted to the pursuit of peace; major writings on war and peace are found in every period of his life from 1917 to 1967. Despite the consistency of his opposition to war, there is one major difference between his position during World War I and his position as leader of the Socialist Party. Gradually during the 1920's, Thomas dropped the Christian basis for his pacifism and with it the absolutism of his opposition to war.

Thomas, as a Christian pacifist, had argued that the acceptance of war, the acceptance of the necessity of doing evil to accomplish good, denied that there was a moral universe and a God of love and power. As he changed his religious views, he felt the obligation to relativize his pacifism.

Thomas still thought that war and Christianity were irreconcilable. Long after he himself had moved away from both Christianity and absolute pacifism, he wrote:

And today, no more than in 1917, can I find a way of reconciling Christianity and war. War by its very nature is the negation of Christian ethics. For a Christian to support it cannot, I think, be in accordance with the will of God, if God be at once a
God of love and power. 17

On the other hand, Thomas thought that absolute pacifism needed to be based on a kind of religious faith to which the fate of men and societies on this planet are of comparatively little concern, "or which offers the believer strong trust in God's intervention in behalf of a nation which will choose the way of suffering rather than any sort of violence." 18 Thomas had never been able to accept the first types of religious faith; after the middle of the 1920's he could no longer accept the second.

Though Thomas' World War I pacifism had been based on Christian beliefs, his abhorrence of war was not reduced by the slipping away of that faith.

I continued to believe what Simone Weil has recently expressed with extraordinary clarity and power; force, most of all the extreme force of war, "is that which turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing. Force is as pitiless to the man who possesses it or thinks he does, as it is to its victims: the second it crushes, the first it intoxicates." It is the possessor rather than the possessed of men. 19

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17 Ibid., pp. 262-263.
Thomas' opposition to war was now based on the fact that he considered it a cause of great evil; the good results that it might lead to did not compensate for the evil involved. War did not solve the problems of injustice or aggression; rather it simply laid the foundation for future injustices or future wars and diminished the opportunities for constructive efforts to eliminate poverty, injustices, and war from the world. Still, in an imperfect world which cannot depend upon divine intervention, it is possible that at rare times, violence may be better than all other possible alternatives. The decision regarding the acceptance of a particular war must be made on the basis of the best way to aid the cause of eliminating war and poverty from the world and is not a decision to be made on the absolute plane. 20

Despite the fact that it is theoretically possible that war might be the better or the best alternative in some political situation, it is nevertheless evil by its very nature. The two most basic principles of social ethics, according to Thomas, are that bad means employed for good

20 See, for example, Thomas to John Nevin Sayre, December 30, 1936 (Thomas Papers); Thomas to Maynard Krueger, December 11, 1941 (Thomas Papers).
ends corrupt those ends and that, secondly, individuals should be treated as ends and not as means. War is a direct violation of both those principles. It reduces the individual to a means, or, in the terms of Weil which Thomas admired, turns anyone who is subjected to it into a thing. Being evil, war corrupts the ends for which it is used; both victor and vanquished are hurt by the application of this means to the problems of the world. War, then, is an evil. Even if it should prove to be the only acceptable alternative in some case, it must even then be considered an evil, though a necessary one.

Though Thomas had written much about the problems of achieving peace during the 1920's and early 1930's, his first full-length book on war, War: No Glory, No Profit, No Need, published in 1935, is the best expression of his full perspective on war after he had abandoned his absolute religious pacifism.

21 Thomas, A Socialist's Faith, pp. 304-305.

In War: No Glory, No Profit, No Need, Thomas argues that there is no glory in war by describing in detail some of the actual battlefield scenes of World War I. The first step toward the elimination of war from the world is the realization that modern war is mass murder, that it brings out the most brutal and most inhuman sides of the men who actually fight it. 23

Another example of the fact that war exemplifies what is worst in man is the situation on the homefronts during the Great War. Individual freedoms were denied; the mob spirit flourished; "greed and hate found protection by waving the flag." 24 The war brought out and encouraged attitudes destructive of what is highest in humanity. This is the reality of war: "Truth and liberty are the first casualties of war. The home fires were kept burning by a definite and official propaganda of lies and hate." 25 No one really understands the true nature of war or its effects upon soldiers and civilians until he recalls that all

24Ibid., p. 50.
25Ibid., p. 55.
governments thought it necessary, through propaganda lies, to keep hysteria at sufficient pitch to support the mass murder.

From all indications, the next war will be worse. It is foolish to think that the attempt to limit war by outlawing certain weapons, like poison gas and submarines, will be successful. "If men are mad enough to fight at all they will use the best weapons they have." It is surely more utopian to talk of restricting war to certain weapons, of limiting war, than to talk of ending it completely.

There is no profit in war. Though a few individuals profit -- or think they profit -- at the expense of their fellows, the society as a whole suffers terribly.

What we are saying is that by its very nature war, especially war under modern conditions, makes a good peace impossible. The human material upon which any worthy peace depends has inevitably been brutalized and coarsened by war. The material resources for the struggle against poverty have been lessened. The "heroes," whether of the victorious or the vanquished nation, have been disciplined in the acceptance of violence and a kind of blind obedience to leaders. In war there is no choice except between complete obedience and mutiny. Yet a decent civilization depends on the capacity of

26 Ibid., p. 82.
men to govern themselves by processes under which loyalty is consistent with constructive criticism.\textsuperscript{27}

The main root of war is the economic: it is the struggle for gain. This is not to say that wars are plotted by profiteers. Rather, war is a logical part of the struggle for profit in a world divided into nations and classes.\textsuperscript{28}

War is the result of the fact that men have organized themselves on the basis of loyalties that imply strife. Modern man has built society out of loyalty to two principles, both of which ignore the fact of interdependence: the first is the notion of nationalism, which sees in the state a law unto itself, above the moral code, ready to do whatever is necessary to secure its own ends; the second is the economic system of capitalism, "the system based on private ownership of the natural resources and of the great tools of production and distribution, and their management by or for the owners in the hope of profit."\textsuperscript{29} Both nationalism

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., p. 106. See also Thomas, As I See It, pp. 57-58.

\textsuperscript{28}Thomas, War: No Glory, No Profit, No Need, pp. 128-129.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 133. See also Thomas, The Choice Before Us (New York, 1970; first published 1934), pp. 30f; Thomas, The Challenge of War, pp. 8f.
and capitalism glorify strife as the road to glory and profit. They are tied together in history and the combination is imperialism. The First World War is an example of the extent to which nationalism and capitalism cause war. It was a war born of the struggle of the rival imperial systems for the profits to be made by exploiting weaker peoples.\textsuperscript{30}

It is necessary to conclude from this that, because war and the preparation for war are so bound up with the capitalist-nationalist system, there is only limited usefulness in proving that war does not pay. It is also necessary to realize that "there is no advantage to mankind in the entire capitalist-nationalist system of whose evil fruits war is only one and the worst."\textsuperscript{31} Man's loyalties to capitalism and nationalism prepare them psychologically and emotionally for war.\textsuperscript{32}

Men must end large-scale wars. "The struggle against world war or to keep America out of world war must be won."

\textsuperscript{30}Thomas, War: No Glory, No Profit, No Need, p. 136.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 146.

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p. 147.
By comparison nothing else matters. This struggle must take place on different levels at once. It is necessary to try to find a way to prevent a particular war while at the same time trying to change the capitalist-nationalist system that breeds war. No particular war is absolutely inevitable at a particular time but our basic loyalties lead to conflicts that make particular wars, sooner or later, virtually inevitable.

Another way to put matters is this: the struggle for peace is a struggle for other methods of conflict than the method of war; it is a struggle against the easy acceptance of war as a social remedy for what men or certain groups of men think to be wrong; and it is a struggle against the causes of war.

The search for other methods of conflicts than war must take place on several levels. Though the ethical difference between violent and non-violent resistance is not so great as some American enthusiasts for Gandhi think, hatred of war must encourage consideration of non-violent struggles.

33Ibid., p. 150.

34Ibid., p. 152. On the necessity of pursuing peace at different levels and with different plans at the same time, see Thomas, "The Outlawry of War," The World Tomorrow, VII (January, 1924); Thomas, America's Way Out: A Program for Democracy (New York, 1931), pp. 97f.
citizens can attempt to prevent their nations from going to war through the announced intention of thousands of men that they will not participate in war and by efforts to convince labor organizations to strike against mobilization.\textsuperscript{35}

At the same time that these efforts are being made within nations, work should be done toward the establishment of an international police force. The actions of such a police force, even when some violent force is used, are not to be considered the same as war.\textsuperscript{36} Yet, it is most important that such a police force be truly international and not just an alliance of the powerful nations to protect their own interests. Thomas, with other Socialists, had opposed the entry of the United States into the League of Nations in 1919 and 1920 because he feared that the League would be used by men like Clemenceau to enforce the peace of Versailles, that the League would become a new and more deadly Holy Alliance.\textsuperscript{37} An international police force can contribute toward

\textsuperscript{35} Thomas, War: No Glory, No Profit, No Need, pp. 166-170.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., pp. 183-184.

\textsuperscript{37} Thomas, "Now I Am for the League," op. cit., pp. 176-177.
peace only if it is not the tool of the imperial powers and only if it is not the simple enforcer of the status quo.

To identify peace with the status quo is to make peace hateful. 38

Thanks largely to the fact that the refusal of the United States to join prevented the League of Nations from becoming the Holy Alliance that it was moving toward in 1919, the League has since developed a degree of true internationalism. Yet the League, or some other such international body, cannot truly become the expression of an internationalism that makes for peace until there is a fuller realization that all peoples have common political and economic interests. True internationalism and true peace will be the result of the recognition that the world is interdependent and that the interests of each nation are served through cooperation, not competition, with others. Peace ultimately depends upon the development of new loyalties. 40

38 Thomas, War: No Glory, No Profit, No Need, p. 172.
40 Thomas, War: No Glory, No Profit, No Need, pp. 183-184.
It is impossible "to disarm materially in a world that will not disarm spiritually."\textsuperscript{41} There will be no true peace until the primary cause of war, the capitalist-nationalist system is replaced. The struggle for peace is a struggle "to end the profit system"\textsuperscript{42} and a struggle "against claiming for the national state a loyalty which man owes only to humanity."\textsuperscript{43} The struggle for peace is a struggle for a socialistic, cooperative commonwealth and an international federation of cooperative commonwealths. Socialism would not automatically establish peace, but it would make the path to peace less difficult. In the beginning of this struggle for peace, the efforts of Americans to accomplish these drastic and constructive changes will have to be confined largely to the United States, to the development of democratic socialism on the national scene. But even in the efforts to build a cooperative commonwealth at home, Socialists must be constantly aware of that internationalism that is an essential part of socialism.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., p. 187.
\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., p. 130.
\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., p. 202.
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., p. 203.
The struggle for peace, Thomas insists, must be an attempt to change the system that produces wars as well as an effort to prevent particular wars. He is not so concerned with the ultimate cure of war, however, that he has no program for the immediate situation. In addition to encouraging men to announce their refusal to participate in any future war and urging that labor unions strike against mobilization, Thomas recommends a five-point program to the government of the United States:

1. The first point is: "An immediate, solemn declaration of national policy by the President and Congress that the United States will not supply, or permit its citizens to supply, arms, munitions, or financial support to belligerents or prospective belligerents."\(^{45}\)

2. A national program for peace requires as its second point: "the largest measure of disarmament that the public can be persuaded to accept."\(^{46}\) Disarmament also means the elimination of programs that inculcate militarism and nationalism, such as the ROTC program.

\(^{45}\textit{Ibid.},\ p.\ 188.\)

\(^{46}\textit{Ibid.},\ p.\ 194.\)
3. Peace and disarmament to defensive level require the elimination of imperialist policies which are a logical result of capitalism. 47

4. The United States must improve its relations with other nations. In particular, we "should end at once the insult we offer friendly nations -- China as well as Japan -- by our Asiatic exclusion laws." 48

5. The United States should adopt as its principle of international policy: "Isolation from all that makes for war; cooperation with all that makes for peace." 49

The positions expressed by Thomas in War: No Glory, No Profit, No Need in 1935 remained Thomas' approach to war throughout the years of his leadership of the Socialist Party. He always worked both for the prevention of immediate wars and the end of the nationalist-capitalist system that, he thought, breeds wars. He was convinced that the United States, when wars were waging in other parts of the world, could do more to aid the cause of peace by remaining at peace than by getting involved. He continued

47 Ibid., p. 197.
48 Ibid., pp. 198-199.
49 Ibid., p. 199.
throughout the rest of his public life to advocate programs (often worked out in detail) of disarmament and international control, though the details varied with such major historical developments as the introduction of atomic weapons and the organization of the United Nations. 50 He remained convinced that militarism in any form greatly diminished the hopes of peace 51 and that a "Cold war" was a preliminary to and not an acceptable substitute for a hot war. He continued to hold that the loyalties involved in capitalism and nationalism were incompatible with peace while the loyalties of socialism and internationalism were incompatible with war. 52

Two situations presented a real test to the peace-loving spirit of Thomas the anti-fascist: the Spanish Civil War and the possibility of American involvement in the war against Hitler. A consideration of the positions he took in these situations indicates the way in which his general

50See, for example, Thomas, Appeal to the Nations (New York, 1945) and Thomas, The Prerequisites for Peace (New York, 1959).

51See Thomas, Conscription: The Test of the Peace (Post War World Council, 1944).

52See, for example, Thomas; We Have A Future (Princeton; N. J., 1941), pp. 203-204.
position was applied to particular cases.

In 1936, some New York Socialists proposed the forma-
tion of a "Debs Column," a delegation of five hundred trained
volunteers who, under the sponsorship of American Socialists,
would be sent to Spain to fight with the Loyalists against
the Franco-led and Hitler-supported enemy. Thomas did not
partake in the original planning for the enterprise, but
accepted the plan that had been presented to him. Thomas
had been most pleased with and hopeful of the direction in
which Spain had been moving as a republic and was utterly
opposed to the Franco counter-revolution and the fascism
that it represented. There is no doubt that "it was the
Spanish crisis which brought the sharpest tests to my strong
but pragmatic and relative pacifism." 53

As has been indicated, Thomas' pacifism was not the
type that made mere abstraction from war the supreme goal.
His goal was the achievement of a warless world and he was
a pacifist in the sense that he thought war was not the way
to achieve that goal. It made a great difference for the
future of the cause of peace how the Civil War in Spain was

53 Thomas, Autobiography, p. 179.
It is unrealistic and mad to say that it does not matter who wins in Spain if only the guns are stilled. It matters profoundly not only for Spain but for mankind that the fascist aggression of which Franco is the nominal and brutal leader be defeated. Persons who believe this must support the gallant resistance of the workers and other loyalists.\textsuperscript{54}

It is important for world peace that the result of the civil war not be a "strong fascist government in virtual alliance with Italy and Germany surrounding France."\textsuperscript{55}

The chances of avoiding a world war and of keeping the United States out of war would be greatly improved with a loyalist victory. In response to a Fellowship of Reconciliation criticism of his and the Party's decision to send fighters to Spain, Thomas noted that an opposition to war such as his, that is relative and not absolute, requires that he decide as well as he can "what is the best way to minimize war and to advance our cause in connection with the Spanish crisis."\textsuperscript{56} He concluded that the victory of

\textsuperscript{54}Thomas, "The Pacifist's Dilemma," \textit{The Nation}, 144 (January 16, 1937), 67.

\textsuperscript{55}Thomas to Max Raskin, December 4, 1936 (Thomas Papers).

\textsuperscript{56}Thomas to John Nevin Sayne, December 30, 1936 (Thomas Papers).
the Loyalists was best and that American Socialists should aid in this cause through the sending of volunteers.

It is important to note that Thomas did not think the cause of peace would be helped if the Loyalists won at any price. For example, he was totally opposed to attempts to get the American government to interfere on behalf of the Loyalists. He was as convinced as ever that "it is mad utopianism to believe that the government can be armed for international war against fascist aggression or can enter such a war at a price tolerable to the American people or to mankind."

Thomas maintained that the Socialist Party had not abandoned its opposition to war between states. There was an enormous difference, he argued, between aiding with volunteers one side in an existing civil war in the hopes of making a second world war less likely and supporting a war of the American government which would conscript men regardless of their convictions for a war between states.

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The actual number of volunteers sent to Spain by the Socialist Party was not large and Thomas lost all enthusiasm for the Debs Column program when, after a trip to Spain in 1937, he realized the extent to which the Communists controlled the Loyalists' brigades. Nevertheless, the episode is important in that it is the first time, Thomas supported a war in any sense. It reflects an application, not a contradiction, of the type of pacifism that he adopted when he could no longer accept the Christian God. While convinced that international war was not the way to peace, he looked at the Spanish situation in an attempt to determine how the existing situation could be directed toward a solution that would improve the chances of peace in Europe. As he wrote at this time, it is not just a refusal to participate in war, "but the establishment of a warless world" that must be the goal. Aiding the legitimate government of Spain in a "police action" against the fascists was a legitimate method of trying to achieve that goal.

The attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, meant for Thomas the defeat of "the dearest single ambition of my

life: that I might have been of service in keeping my country out of a second world war."60 Indeed, most of Thomas' efforts between the years 1937 and 1941 were devoted to attempts to prevent the beginning of a second world war and, especially, to keeping the United States out of the European war that was clearly coming in 1937-1938 and that began in September, 1939.

Though Thomas has often been accused of being an isolationist in the immediate pre-war years,61 it was certainly not Thomas' intention that America should only be concerned with itself and let the rest of the world make it the best it could on its own. He refused to join the America First Organization because of its isolationism; he advocated programs for refugees (which were ignored).62 His opposition to American involvement in the war against Hitler was based on the belief that an America at peace could do more to defeat totalitarianism and lay the basis

60 Thomas, What Is Our Destiny (Garden City, New York, 1944), p. 32.

61 Most recently by Bernard K. Johnp持久, Pacifist's Progress: Norman Thomas and the Decline of American Socialism (Chicago, 1970), Chapter VII.

62 Thomas, Autobiography, p. 98.
for future peace than an America at war.

Thomas argued against American participation in World War II along two lines: what it would do to America, and what it would do to the future chances of peace in the world. On both levels, he was convinced that the likely evil consequences of going to war were greater than the likely evil consequences of not aiding the Allies militarily. Of the two reasons for staying out, the second was more important:

The supreme reason for keeping America out of war is not, however, our own safety. That, also, is an honorable cause. But the supreme reason for peace is the fact that only in an America spared from war can we develop for ourselves and for mankind the new techniques of conflict against the system which breeds poverty, tyranny, and war, without the wholesale murder, the mass insanity, and bitter frustration which are war's inescapable heritage.63

If America goes to war, it will "have lost the opportunity that is ours to make democracy work so conspicuously in the economic and the political field that its success will be a challenge to the people of every land."64 An America at peace can prove that democracy can work and give hope to

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64 Thomas to Editor, Herald Tribune, September 12, 1939 (Thomas Papers).
people under totalitarian governments; an America at war will probably be driven by the necessities of total war a long way toward becoming a militaristic totalitarian state itself. In that case, the American involvement in war would not have helped the American people or the peoples of Europe. 65

Thomas put great emphasis, in his arguments against American participation in the war, on the importance of a peaceful and democratic America as an example for suffering people everywhere: "While all Europe is darkened, ours is the task of keeping the torch of civilization alight and burning ever more brightly here." 66 It is the duty of America at this hour of history to set an example of peace. Making democracy work at home through the ending of racial and national intolerance and the overcoming of economic oppressions and the expanding of civil liberties: this will do more for freedom and democracy in the world than large American armies fighting in Europe. True democracy must depend on fraternity and equality and respect for the individ-


ual; this democracy cannot be spread by war, which in itself is a denial of fraternity, equality, and individual freedom. 67

An America at peace and maintaining and extending its democracy and freedom, can serve as a better inspiration and example than an America adopting totalitarianism and war. An America at peace can find better and easier ways to aid the underground movements of the masses for peace and justice in Europe. An America at peace can find better ways to help all peoples — all of them impartially — to take their destinies into their own hands and to put an end to the present war and to the system from which it sprang. 68

Means and ends are inextricably one; freedom is not to be achieved by the unfreedom of war. The ends achieved are determined by the actual steps taken in the efforts to achieve the goal, not by the announced goal. It must be remembered that "the choice of intrinsically inappropriate means can only lead to a far different end from the one designated or proposed to justify their use." 69

Thomas was convinced, largely because of the lack of concern for liberties demonstrated by the government during

67 Ibid., pp. 181-184.
68 Ibid., pp. 176-177.
69 Ibid., p. 168.
World War I, that the United States would lose its democracy if it went to war. In a nation where democracy is not clearly understood, it is all but certain that, despite idealistic motives, "total war fought thousands of miles from home will require totalitarianism: propaganda, censorship, and conscription raised to the nth degree." America's involvement in World War II means far more certainly the creation of American totalitarianism than it does the defeat of it in Europe.

The social attitudes required for true peace and justice are incompatible with modern totalitarian war. It is a primary condition for progress toward these goals in America and around the world that America keep out of the war.

70 It is shown clearly in H. C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, Opponents of War 1917-1918 (Seattle, 1957) just how completely democracy was in fact suspended during World War I. Thomas had reason to be afraid of what might happen if there were another such war.

71 Thomas, We Have A Future, p. 98.

72 Thomas, column in The Call (May 10, 1941), p. 5; also Thomas, "Is the Extension of the Draft Necessary?" Vital Speeches, VII (August 15, 1941). 672.

73 Thomas, Socialism on the Defensive, p. 298.
To keep America out of World War II was the greatest single ambition of Thomas's life:

Is it not clear, then, that if we went to "war against totalitarianism" the very first result — on the very day of its declaration — would be totalitarianism here? Does not the struggle against totalitarianism, like charity and all essential human duties, begin at home? Is not the struggle against totalitarianism, if it is honestly meant, first of all a struggle against involvement in war? What shall it profit us if we set out on a crusade to free the whole world, and lose our own freedom in one of the few corners of the world where some measure of freedom still exists?  

As in the Spanish situation, Thomas had no objection to individual volunteers aiding the Allies out of conviction. His objection was to war by governments, which treated men and their consciences as expendable.  

America's entry into World War II and the way it came about left Thomas with an extremely distasteful choice. He could not accept the conscientious objection position as he had done in World War I because he long ago decided that questions such as this had to be decided on the basis of political alternatives, not on the basis of absolute pacifism.

74 Thomas and Wolfe, Keep America Out of War: A Program, p. 37.

The political alternatives as he saw them were two, neither
of which was good: war or surrender. "Under all these cir-
cumstances, I see no practical political alternative for my
self or for the Party but critical support of the war with
an eager intention to find the first practicable opportunity
to end it by a peace offensive." 76

Surrender was a worse evil than war; the lesser evil
had to be chosen: "What tortured me most was the conviction
that I had to accept war, a thing I had so utterly loathed,
because there was no conceivable political alternative." 77
Surrender could not be considered a real political alterna-
tive for the United States in 1941.

Thomas', "critical support" of World War II after
Pearl Harbor was not inconsistent with his earlier opposi-
tion to American entry into the war. His opposition had
not been "based on the grounds of absolute pacifism or ab-
solute Marxism," 78 but on his determination of what policy.

76 Thomas to Maynard Krueger, December 11, 1941
    (Thomas Papers).


78 Thomas, Memorandum for the National Executive Com-
    mittee, December 19, 1941 (Thomas Papers).
was best for America. Now that the United States had been
attacked, fighting was the best of the alternatives.
Thom's support was "critical" in that he intended to con-
tinue to speak and work during the war for democracy at home
and for a peace abroad that was based on cooperation and
that was not imperialist. His support of the war was not to
imply that he would suspend his criticism of specific govern-
ment policies.  

Most of Thomas' efforts during the more than twenty-
five years of life that he had left after Pearl Harbor were
devoted to a search for peace in the world.

During World War II, Thomas conducted his peace of-
fensive on two levels: democracy at home and the conduct
of the war. He was one of the most outspoken opponents of
the deportation of Japanese-Americans from the West Coast to
detention camps. He was most critical of such war-measures,
among others, as the demand for "unconditional surrender"
and the use of the atomic bomb. He continued to insist upon

79See Thomas to Jerry Voorhis, December 12, 1941
(Thomas Papers).
80Thomas, Democracy and Japanese Americans (Post War
World Council, 1942).
the same requirements for a successful peace that he had before: that true peace in the world demands a successful democracy in America ("no probable excellence of peace arrangements will make democracy and the non-militaristic way of life prevail among other peoples if it cannot be made conspicuously successful in America, the strongest and most fortunate of nations."\textsuperscript{81}) and that the means used determine their own ends ("the choices we make during the war are vital to shaping the future, in the aggregate far more important than the wisest plan drawn in a study."\textsuperscript{82}).

America's example of working democracy was vital to peace in the world: "If we had to choose -- as I have insisted that we do not -- between attention to our democracy in relative neglect of the rest of the world, and active participation in world politics, it would be better for the world as well as ourselves to choose the first alternative."\textsuperscript{83}

Support of the war does not mean that one can approve of all methods used to achieve a military victory.

\textsuperscript{81} Thomas, \textit{What is Our Destiny}, pp. 140-141.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., p. 91.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 141.
Such support:

does not require us to blind ourselves to the brutal and irrational nature of the method we are forced to use and the inevitable and inescapable tendencies of its own character to frustrate the achievement of the end which so many high-minded warriors have made their own. 84

In the years after World War II, Thomas' struggle for peace continued on lines totally consistent with his earlier positions. He continued to insist that militarism and deterrence are not the way to a successful peace, or peace at all. 85 He continued to argue that men live by their loyalties and that the loyalties of nationalism and capitalism (culminating in imperialism) are loyalties productive of war. 86 He continued to insist that the notion of sovereignty is immoral because it puts the nation above the moral law: "World peace is no more to be found in an anarchy of sovereign nations than domestic peace is to be found in an anarchy of sovereign individuals who recognize

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84 ibid., p. 39.
85 See especially Thomas, Conscription: The Test of the Peace; Thomas, Appeal to the Nations.
86 See, for example, Thomas, Appeal to the Nations and The Prerequisites for Peace.
no law but their own interest and desires." He continued to insist that we cannot achieve peace without at the same time achieving freedom and economic justice; fraternity, liberty, and equality are indivisible. He continued to insist that "peace requires the extension of the principle of cooperation," the same principle that is basic to democratic socialism.

The practical program that Thomas advocated for the achievement of peace revolved around disarmament under a strengthened United Nations (with specific suggestions for strengthening the U. N.) and disengagement as far as possible of the large and powerful (and potentially imperialistic) nations from the affairs of the developing countries. Aggression is not to be appeased (appeasement being the "immoral business of looking the other way while the strong gobble the weak"), but the best force to prevent aggression is an international police force. Thomas supported

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88 See Thomas, A Socialist's Faith, p. 234.
89 Thomas, "Appraisal of Political Parties," Vital Speeches, XIV (October 1, 1948), 749.
90 Thomas, Appeal to the Nations, p. 136.
the Korean War, with the same reluctance with which he had supported World War II, because it was truly police action and any other action would have doomed the United Nations.

He was, on the other hand, in the forefront of the Americans who opposed the Vietnam War, even though he was in his eighties. 91

Norman Thomas, as leader of the Socialist Party, devoted his life to attempts to eliminate war from America and from the world. In his devotion to the cause of peace and in his conviction of the fruitlessness and evil of war, he can be considered a pacifist; his conviction that, politically speaking, war is occasionally the only acceptable alternative made him a "relative" pacifist.

Thomas referred to his own pacifism as pragmatic. He chose to call it pragmatic for, apparently, two reasons: his opposition to war was not absolute (there were wars that he could and did support) and it was based upon concern for the consequences (he thought that war almost always defeated the purposes for which it was fought). It would perhaps be more accurate to describe his attitude toward

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91See, for example, Thomas, The Choices.
war as ethical pacifism. War was wrong in itself because it violated one of the primary principles of social ethics: man was reduced to a means and a thing in war; war made man expendable. War was wrong as a national policy because it violated a second basic principle of social ethics: good ends cannot be accomplished by evil means. War was evil and even when it was the best of the political options it remained an evil, although a necessary one. Ordinarily, a "pragmatic" pacifism means that war is condemned precisely because of the results, not because it denies principles of proper ethical behavior. For Thomas, war was evil in itself. It would be a mistake, however, to deny that there was any pragmatism in Thomas' pacifism. It was on the basis of the anticipated results that Thomas decided whether or not to support a war (as a necessary evil). The important thing to note is that for Thomas there was no real difference between pragmatic pacifism and ethical relative pacifism. True to the Social Gospel tradition, he remained convinced that good ethics makes good practical politics. Whatever is ethically wrong will have evil consequences; whatever will lead to evil consequences is ethically wrong. With the loss of the Christian basis for his absolute
pacifism, Thomas was able to support some wars; this meant, however, that evil was sometimes politically necessary, not that evil became good because it was necessary.

Thomas wrote in 1932:

I believe there is such a philosophy that goes deeper than pragmatism, a philosophy that approaches a kind of religion of liberty, equality and fraternity. I believe that the appeal of such a philosophy is ethical, but not in any sense which sets ethics apart from life and the developing economics of our times. Certainly it is not a philosophy without power or one which appeals only to a generalized reason and goodwill. It appeals very definitely and specifically to the exploited workers with hand and brain throughout the world.  

Thomas continued to be a prophet of the Kingdom, the Kingdom which had become identified, in the Social Gospel tradition, as the Kingdom of liberty, equality, and fraternity. He continued to see war as a complete denial of everything that the Kingdom represented. Thus he devoted so much of his life's work to a search for peace. His support of the plan to send volunteers to Spain and his acceptance of World War II after Pearl Harbor do not deny this conviction that war is the complete denial of

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92 Thomas, As I See It, p. 15.
man's goal. These decisions merely reflect the fact that, with the dismissal of the idea of an intervening God, he felt he could no longer simply reject war- whatever the consequences. His pacifism became relative but his whole pursuit of peace reflected his devotion to the nature and the ethics of the Social Gospel Kingdom.

It is useful to contrast Thomas' politics of peace with that of a more pragmatic orientation. The two approaches are sometimes referred to as political "idealism" and political "realism."

In the terms of Reinhold Niebuhr, "realism" denotes the disposition to take into account all factors in a social and political situation which offer resistance to established norms, particularly the factors of self-interest and power.

while "idealism" is ... characterized by loyalty to moral norms and ideals, rather than to self-interest, whether individual or collective."94 For the realist, all plans for the future start with the question: where do we go from


94Ibid.
The limitations of human history are emphasized. For the idealist, the starting point is the goal rather than the present, and the emphasis is on new possibilities rather than on perennial limitations.

These differences of temper and viewpoint are finally focused upon a crucial issue: the problem of power. The realist knows that history is not a simple rational process but a vital one. All human societies are organizations of diverse vitalities and interests. Some balance of power is the basis of whatever justice is achieved in human relations. Where the disproportion of power is too great and where an equilibrium of social forces is lacking, no mere rational or moral demands can achieve justice.

The idealists are inclined to view history from the standpoint of the moral and social imperative, which a rational analysis of a situation generates. Thus, for example, they look at the world and decide that its social and economic problems demand and require a "federation of the world." They think of such a federation not primarily in terms of the complex economic and social interests and vitalities, which must be brought into and held in a tolerable equilibrium. Least of all do they think of the necessity of some dominant force or power as the organizing center of the equilibrium. They are on the whole content to state the ideal requirements of the situation in as rigorous terms as possible.\footnote{Ibid., p. 65.}

The extreme form of the idealist in politics is the political pacifist who becomes a conscientious objector in wartime. He, more clearly than anyone else, approaches...
political questions, through stating the ideal rather than through power politics.

Though he could not take the position himself, Thomas, even after Pearl Harbor, greatly admired the stands of absolute pacifists and conscientious objectors. Conscientious objectors should not be considered anti-social, he argued, because they were testifying to two great social principles:

first, the necessity for humanity to get rid of the method of war if it would preserve and develop the highest values of the human spirit; second, the affirmation that liberty perishes if the political state becomes an absolute god over the lives and consciences of men. 96

Thomas continued to think that absolute pacifists might be the pioneers of the ultimate protest against war that will someday save the world, but at the present time such pacifists do not have political influence; their position cannot be that of a political party. 97

Thomas' whole approach to war demonstrates the "idealist" rather than the "realist" nature of his politics.

96 Thomas, What is Our Destiny, p. 9.

97 Thomas to Maynard Krueger, December 11, 1941 (Thomas Papers).
He started with moral norms and with the goal; he thought men capable of overcoming much self-interest; he emphasized the role of example (freedom and justice at home) and of education (the changing of loyalties) in achieving peace in the world. He refused to think of politics as the art of balancing self-interests and balancing power; to Thomas, politics was the means to be used to achieve a world without war, to achieve the ideal society.

While Thomas admitted that political responsibility necessitated, at times, the choice of a lesser evil instead of the good, he thought that the right is more often the practical than most men think, that when there is a difference between the practical and the right, it is usually because of a failure to do the right earlier, and that society is making progress to the extent that the right and the practical are identical ever more often. Perhaps the most complete statement that Thomas ever made on the dilemma of compromise and principle and the problem of taking stands on particular issues which arise out of the capitalist system while rejecting that system was a letter Thomas wrote to Daniel Bell in 1947:
The dilemma which you state exists, and I have never been able to find a perfect verbal or logical solution of it. Political action always requires compromise and it is difficult to say in advance with dogmatic certainty at just what point compromise becomes betrayal. I have never said "fiat justitiae ruat coelum." On the contrary, I remember observing publicly that if the heavens fell, there wouldn't be much left of justice.

I have to confess that I doubt if a responsible ruler of a present day government could act by the ethical standards that an individual might be able to follow. If he tried he might be doing more harm than good. I always had a certain sympathy for Rex Tugwell's remark -- when he was in a somewhat despondent mood -- that no man could be president of the United States who wasn't a crook, but that Roosevelt was at least a smart and successful crook. Apparently crookedness helped the people. In a moral sense, the whole hope of democracy depends upon its ability rapidly to advance the day when ethical conduct is a "relevant alternative"! It is even now more often a relevant alternative than we think, and situations in which there is no choice except between degrees of evil usually arise from our earlier neglect of a relevant ethical choice or series of choices.98

Thomas' position on war and peace in his post-Christian days did not greatly differ from his position at the time of World War I. Thomas continued to base his politics on the ethical principles -- Christian ethical principles -- cooperation and the dignity of the individual. War was

98 Quoted in Fleishman, op. cit., p. 243.
wrong because it made the individual a means rather than an end and because it epitomized and fostered hatred and strife where there should be love and cooperation. He remained very close, also, to the political nature of his earlier Christian pacifism. Ethics and politics are by no means as separate as most people think.

Though Thomas the politician came to see the necessity of choosing the lesser evil at times, he did not move from his earlier abhorrence of unprincipled pragmatism. He continued to seek solutions to the problem of war on the basis of his ideals and his ethical principles. Though occasions like Pearl Harbor demanded the choice of war over a greater evil, he was "tortured" to make such a decision and remained warmly respectful of absolute pacifists. He often spoke wistfully of his World War I pacifism and wished he could return to it. 99 His intellectual convictions would not permit him to return to that absolute pacifism, but he remained close to it, very close indeed.

4. Freedom and Dissent

In 1947, Norman Thomas wrote an article entitled "What's Right with America."

Tomorrow I shall go back to pointing out some of the things wrong in America and to suggesting how they may be made right. I shall do it with more confidence because we have a heritage and a history which justify faith in man's capacity for freedom and fair play.100

It is in no way surprising that Thomas should single out America's tradition of freedom as worthy of particular mention. Freedom was one of the outstanding concerns of his life and it ranks next to peace as the goal to which he contributed most energy and devotion. He confessed that his was an individualist temperament101 and that "All my life I have craved freedom 'to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience.'102 His opposition to war was, as we have seen, closely tied up with his devotion to freedom and democracy. His socialism was likewise partially based on freedom: "It was the denial of true freedom in acquisi-


101 Thomas, Autobiography, p. 228.

102 Ibid., p. 248.
tive society as much as preventable poverty which made me a Socialist.\footnote{103}

One cannot read Thomas' *Autobiography* without being impressed by the great pride he took in his personal battles for civil liberties. In testing the constitutionality of a Bergen County, New Jersey, riot law in 1926 and in bringing to the attention of the nation the suspension of constitutional freedoms by Mayor Frank Hague in Jersey City and by Indiana's Governor Paul McNutt (whom Thomas dubbed the "Hoosier Hitler") in the 1930's Thomas took bold action in pursuit and defense of freedom.

The starting point of Thomas' devotion to liberty is his belief in the dignity of the individual. One of his two basic principles of social ethics, it will be recalled, is that individuals must be treated as ends and not as means. The individual human being should be subordinated to nothing, not to the state, not to victory in war, and not to other supposed good ends. Emphasis on individual dignity implies emphasis on freedom; it is clearly inconsistent to think of the individual as an end in himself and

\footnote{Ibid.}
then deny him the freedom to think and act for himself.

"The Judeo-Christian tradition, with its respect for the individual, played a great role in laying the basis for freedom." 104

Thomas' belief in individual dignity and individual freedom led him to the position that only a society governed as a democracy can protect this freedom and respect the individual.

For the believer in the dignity of the individual, there is only one standard by which to judge a given society and that is the degree to which it approaches the ideal of a fellowship of free men. Unless one can believe in the practicability of some sort of anarchy, or find evidence that there exists a superior and recognizable governing caste to which men should by nature cheerfully submit, there is no approach to a good society save by democracy. The alternative is tyranny. 105

The actual forms of democracy are not of essential importance; a parliament, for example, is not essential to democracy. The real essence of democracy is individual civil liberty. A democracy is possible without a parliament, but a real democratic society does not exist where a citizen does not have the right to criticize the state and not be


105 Thomas, A Socialist's Faith, p. 146.
penalized for it. Individual freedom requires that society be organized on the basis of democratic procedures; democratic forms without civil liberties do not constitute, however, a true democracy.

It is much more accurate to speak of freedom and democracy as "the application of the Jeffersonian principles of freedom of speech, the press and association, and of the right of every individual to protection by due process of law" than in terms of Congress and elections. One of the great difficulties with the realization of freedom in the modern world is the confusion regarding its real meaning. Even worse than the equation of freedom with the externals of democratic organization is its identification with anything or any nation that is anti-Communist or with the type of economic system frequently called, or miscalled, free enterprise. Freedom means nothing unless it means individual civil liberties.

Unless the real meaning of freedom is understood, America might easily destroy or greatly reduce its real


freedom in its battle against the enemies of freedom. The fight against the enemies of freedom cannot use the same oppressive tactics that the enemy uses if freedom is to be preserved. "McCarthyism is really the ally of the foe it purports to fight," 108 As was indicated clearly in the discussion of Thomas' fight to keep the U. S. out of World War II, he did not think that freedom could be spread or protected by adopting methods of dictators. Insisting that democracy could be spread more successfully by example, Thomas held to his faith in the power of demonstration to the end of his life. 109 The first step toward defeating the enemies of freedom throughout the world and protecting American freedom is to make that freedom as complete as possible at home.

The tendency in contemporary America to understand freedom as exemplified in the economic system of capitalism is, to Thomas, a complete mistake. To him real freedom and capitalism are incompatible; his conversion to socialism was partially based on the conviction that democratic


socialism provided a basis for freedom that capitalism could never provide. 110 The three great goals of liberty, equality, and fraternity are interdependent: there can be no liberty without equality and fraternity. It is futile to think that the capitalism that denies and destroys equality and fraternity is a necessary condition for or compatible with real liberty. 111

Capitalism, an economic system based on scarcity, inevitably produces poverty, insecurity, and tyranny. It is quite meaningless to speak of freedom in the midst of preventable poverty, or to insist that a system that breeds poverty, exploitation, and unemployment is essential to freedom. 112 Socialism offers a better opportunity for individual freedom:

It is Utopian to talk of giving liberty to the individual until we have learned to give him that elemental justice without which no freedom is secure. It is by that failure in common justice that our American capitalism stands most condemned; and to give that justice with ever-increasing understanding of what that great word implies is the

110 See Thomas, The Test of Freedom, pp. 16-17.
111 Thomas, As I See It, p. 110.
great service of socialism to the individual.\textsuperscript{113}

In the modern world where power-driven machinery has imposed a certain degree of collectivism and where inter-dependence is a fact, socialism is the only reasonable way of social organization. Just as liberty requires brotherhood, so democracy requires socialism. Socialism, through producing wider security for men, provides the basis for liberty that capitalism can never provide. "It would be a sorry outlook if liberty, civil or religious, were dependent on the right and power of the 'free' man to exploit his fellows by private ownership of productive goods. The contrary is true."\textsuperscript{114}

Civil liberties and democracy are so basic to Thomas' concept of democratic socialism that social movements and governments of nations were largely evaluated on the basis of the extent to which they fostered and incorporated true democracy. There are two outstanding examples of developments in which Thomas had great hope for a long time before, being convinced of their freedom-denying tendencies, he

\textsuperscript{113} Thomas, \textit{America's Way Out}, p. 211

\textsuperscript{114} Thomas, \textit{After the New Deal, What?} (New York, 1936), pp. 184, 156-157.
became a vocal critic. The first is labor unionism; the second is the Communist government of Russia.

Thomas, especially in the 1920's and 1930's, worked vigorously on behalf of labor unions, defending the right to organize and doing some organizational work. "Few men in America not regular union organizers have done more of this sort of work than I." He always insisted that labor unions, to realize their potential of bringing greater industrial democracy to America, needed to operate on the basis of internal democracy. By the 1940's, while still supporting unions, he began to point out what he considered union denials of true freedom; he was particularly opposed to the "closed shop" policy of many unions and the dictatorship of labor's bureaucracy. In the last twenty-five years of his life, Thomas appeared to be more of a critic than a supporter of existing labor unions; his libertarianism is the

115 Thomas, Autobiography, p. 103.


explanation for this change.

Like most socialists of his generation, Thomas had great hopes that the Russian Revolution of 1917 had inaugurated an outstanding example of the good life that is possible under socialism. Though he never accepted the methods of Lenin and certainly never became a Communist himself, he had hopes for many years that real social progress was being made in Russia. It was not until the late 1930's, after a trip to Russia and after the great purge trials, that Thomas became the total foe of the system of Russian Communist dictatorship. He wrote a careful study of the denial of Russian freedoms and became a stinging critic of Russian Communism.

Thomas' major objection to the Russian dictatorship was the same as his opposition to the fascist totalitarianism of Hitler and Mussolini. The evil of the authoritarian, totalitarian state, whether it be fascist or communist, is that the state is made supreme. The state exists not for the individual, but the individual for the state; it is in

118 Norman Thomas and Joel Seidman, Russia: Democracy or Dictatorship? (The League for Industrial Democracy, 1939).
serving the state that the citizen is to find his highest exaltation. This is a complete reversal of true democracy and of the only type of state that is satisfactory.

True democracy puts the emphasis on the individual:

Far more important is its insistence that government exists to serve men, not men to serve government. Thomas Mann is right that its spiritual principle is the dignity of the individual. Democracy degenerates into mobocracy, or falls prey to the dictator unless it guarantees certain rights to individuals. It cannot exist at all except as it sees to it that a minority may become a majority through persuasion. 120

The American Communist Party was also, according to Thomas, guilty of denying the very liberty that was the goal of the socialist movement. In addition to disregard for the dignity of the individual in their choice of undemocratic means, the Communists denied the most basic of liberties within the Party by their dogmatism and slavish obedience to the Russian dictatorship. 121

Thus Thomas retained the earlier criticism he had made of Bolshevism and the attempt to bring Bolshevism to America. The only satisfactory socialist movement or system

119 See, for example, Thomas, The Choice Before Us, pp. 49-51; Thomas, Socialism on the Defensive, pp. 131.

120 Thomas, We Have A Future, p. 127.

121 Thomas, America's Way Out, pp. 85-86.
was one that respected the freedom of the individual and used democratic means. Any other approach was an unacceptable denial of individual freedom and was not capable of establishing a free society. An evil means cannot achieve a good end.

It is especially in the cold war against Communism since the end of World War II that Americans have been tempted to destroy the meaning of freedom in the name of the defense of freedom. While Communism, according to Thomas, is without a doubt freedom-denying, the growth of militarism and the building of a "garrison state" (a term Thomas used before it became fashionable to speak of the "military-industrial complex") defeat the very freedom Americans are trying to protect for themselves and others. Freedom is not preserved by a garrison state; "this worship of military security is inconsistent with the conception of civil liberty as embodied in the First Amendment." 123

Thomas' opposition to military conscription is a good example of his insistence that it is not in the sacrificing of civil liberties at home in order to present a

122 See, for example, Chapter 11 of Thomas, Socialism Re-examined (New York, 1963).

123 Ibid., p. 190.
strong military obstacle to the denial of freedom abroad that real freedom is protected. Among the chief liberties is the right of a man to decide for himself how his own life will be invested and in what war he will fight.

To do or refrain from doing some one thing at behest of the state is a mere trifle compared with investing one's whole life and abdicating all control over one's conduct at behest of the non-moral state in time of war ... liberty of conscience in relation to conscription is a good in itself. 124

The acceptance of military conscription, Thomas argued, has proven itself to be the cornerstone of the totalitarian state in modern times. True democracy depends upon education in self-discipline, initiative, moral judgment, and free cooperation; these goals are made more difficult to achieve by the presence of conscription and the military training which substitutes blind obedience for initiative and moral judgment. 125

Of all the freedoms that Thomas fought for during his long life, none was considered more basic than the freedom of

124 Thomas, America's Way Out, pp. 208-209. See also Thomas, We Have A Future, p. 86.

125 Thomas, Conscript: The Test of the Peace, pp. 7-12.
dissent. It "is the right essential to any concept of the
dignity and freedom of the individual; it is essential to
the search for truth in a world wherein no authority is in-
tellible." 126  The right to dissent is necessary for the
good of the individual and for the good of society. Men
live by their loyalties and the "secret of a good life is to
have the right loyalties and to hold them in the right scale
of values. The value of dissent and dissenters is to make
us reappraise these values with supreme concern for the
truth." 127  Heresy has always been the growing point of
society and the society that forgets, disregards, or suppresses its dissenters does so at its own peril.

In 1961 Thomas published Great Dissenters, in which
he sketched the lives and dissent of five men: Socrates,
Galileo, Thomas Paine, Wendell Phillips, and Gandhi. An
analysis of Thomas' biographies of these five men leads one
to the conclusion that they were singled out because they
possessed one or both of two qualities that Thomas greatly

126 Thomas, "Great Challenge of the Dissenter," The

admired. The first is the determination to be true to oneself and the truth as he understands it regardless of the immediate consequences. This is perhaps best exemplified by Socrates, whom Thomas described as "the great Athenian seeker after Truth, who loved his city, his family, his friends, and his own soul too well to betray them by changing his way of life." The second quality Thomas admired is dissent from the tendency to separate politics from morality. This dissent is exemplified first of all by Wendell Phillips.

What is more important in considering the role of Wendell Phillips is this: Negro slavery was so hideous an evil, so completely contrary to any valid religious or ethical code, so terrible a commentary on the boasted American devotion to personal liberty and democracy, that our nation would have been poisoned in its very soul had there been in it no salt of justice, no lessen of a humanity not conditioned by race, color and servitude. It was the abolitionists who proved that right and wrong had meaning in human institutions as well as in strictly personal relations.

Gandhi was also praised as an example of this type of dissent:

"From a virtually unanimous acceptance of Machiavellian practical politics, from the notion of a necessarily amoral,

128 Ibid., p. 48.
129 Ibid., p. 155.
if not immoral, society, he was the great dissenter. 130
pigment, for Thomas, was associated with the hope of bringing
truth and morality into politics and society.

Norman Thomas' understanding of freedom and dissent
underwent no major changes over the years; as the ex-Chris-
tian leader of the Socialist Party he retained the same basic
position that he had acquired in his early Social Gospel
days. He continued to hold that the dignity of the individ-
ual person is the starting point for all acceptable political
and social movements. He continued to insist that democracy
is the only form of social organization consistent with in-
dividual dignity and that true democracy means individual
liberty. He continued to emphasize the role of dissent as
necessary if society is to develop the new loyalties that
will result in improved life on this planet. He never moved
away from the early convictions that men must be true to
Christian principles and that such witness to truth and
morality is of great benefit to society. Throughout his
life Norman Thomas continued to base his social philosophy
and his politics on the Christian ethical principle that

130 ibid., p. 220.
the individual and his conscience are of supreme value. In his libertarianism, he remained true to his Social Gospel heritage.

5. Socialism

As the presidential candidate, during six consecutive elections, of a political party that advocated socialism by its very name, Norman Thomas was most widely known as a proponent of socialist economics. Along with peace and freedom, socialism was an essential element in the social vision that inspired Thomas to advocate, year after year, programs and a party that were highly unpopular.

An adequate philosophy and program for the correction of the economic problems and injustices of society begins, according to Thomas, with an understanding of the nature and cause of the present problems. "To cure a sick society we must agree that it is sick and discover the cause of the disease." Thomas was convinced that a society that has large pockets of poverty, much unemployment, great wastes, and tremendously unequal distribution of income is sick.

131 Thomas, America's Way Out, p. viii.
He was equally convinced that capitalism is, in large part, the cause of the disease.

Capitalism is, for Thomas, a failure both as an acceptable ethic and as a system of conducting the business of society. It is ethically wrong in that it turns person against person in violation of the principle of human solidarity; it produces false values (for example, earning money becomes more important than doing the job well); it is essentially unjust.

There is no true justice in a system which permits the ownership of so much of the earth and its resources to lie in private hands; there is no true justice in the degree of permissible inheritance that gives the inheritor not only things but claims on other men's labor -- possessions to which he himself has made no contribution. 132

Capitalism is also condemned by its failure to use natural resources and modern machinery effectively for the common good. The great wastes in natural resources that Thomas documented in Human Exploitation in the United States cannot really be overcome, he concluded, as long as lumber and minerals are privately owned and developed for private

profit. Even more important, the exploitation of human beings: wage earners, working women, Negroes—"is the direct result of the private profit system of capitalism. Indeed, exploitation, poverty, insecurity, and tyranny are inherent in capitalism."

The system that is capitalism rests on the private ownership of property and on its management for the profit of the owner rather than for the good of society. It is a system in which individuals and corporations compete for profit without either the power or the desire to plan effectively for the common good. The results of such a system are the wasting of resources and human exploitation.

Capitalism degenerates into a system that breeds corruption and racketeering. The racketeer illegitimately gets something for nothing, but the underworld feels less consciousness of guilt because it recognized a moral, or immoral, kinship with stock gambling, land speculating, and all the processes by which rather than by work men get...

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133 Thomas, Human Exploitation in the United States, p. 481.
144 See Thomas, America's Way Out, p. 31.
money. In What's the Matter With New York, a study which Thomas and Paul Blanshard made of corruption in New York City, the authors noted:

"Tammany is an organization for profit existing in a business system operated for private profit and the two cannot be separated. ... We hope that before we are through the reader will agree with us that the roots of civic corruption in American life lie deep in a predatory economic system and that the fight for clean government is only one battle in the larger struggle for a just social order."

The final indictment of capitalism is that it is especially when joined with nationalism, an outstanding cause of war. The chief root of war is imperialism and imperialism is nothing more than the marriage of capitalism and nationalism. "The whole ethic of 'every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost,' which has characterized capitalism, is the ethic of war."

Capitalism is clearly inadequate as an ethic and as an economic system. What is needed is a system that puts social purpose in the place of zeal for private profit.

135ibid., p. 31.
137Thomas, America's Way Out, p. 37.
production should be governed by the principle of use, not profit; there should be deliberate intention to produce what men want and need rather than what ensures profit. In a word, what is needed is socialism:

Socialism is first of all a reasoned conviction that plenty and peace, freedom and fellowship, lie within the grasp of men. It is the assertion that our failure to conquer poverty in the midst of potential abundance is due to an acceptance of a system which is based on relative scarcity, and upon the exploitation of the masses by an owning class. Socialism believes that men may be free by making power-driven machinery the slave of mankind. It believes in planned production for the use of all rather than an unplanned production for the profit of the owning class. It asserts that this type of production for use requires social ownership of land, natural resources and the principle means of production and distribution, including, of course, the entire system of money, banking and credit.  

Socialism is, like capitalism, both an ethic and an economic system. Instead of the ethic of each man for himself, socialism provides the ethic of cooperation. Instead of an economic system involving production for the profit of a few, socialism is an economic system which (through social ownership and planning) makes possible production for the use of all. Cooperation rather than competition; production for use rather than production for profit: that is  

what is needed to improve both the ethics and the economics of society.

Once this much has been achieved, that is, once men have come to the conviction that capitalism cannot provide plenty, peace, and freedom and that socialism as an alternative is considerably more desirable than half of the battle for socialism will be won. The movement toward the better world that is possible under socialism requires, first of all, that men desire a social order based on cooperation and an economic order geared to production for use and equitable sharing of what is produced. This desire is a necessary precondition for socialism; the socialist movement can never make progress without the growth in society of such a desire. Socialism's progress in American society is first of all progress in the desire for socialism in American society. 149

It is more important, accordingly, that Socialists emphasize the socialist philosophy and ideal more than a definite program or plan. The philosophy and ideal of

cooperation is of the essence of socialism and it is this philosophy that Socialists much teach first of all. Men live by their loyalties and effective action toward the solution of our problems requires a philosophy of cooperation for the common good. The principle of cooperation provides men with a power, both a moral and a practical power, that makes possible the economics programs that are required to root out poverty and injustice.\(^{140}\)

Socialists must put purpose before plan:

To men in earnest, the first step in curing our sick society is not plan but purpose. The truly revolutionary decision concerns not the kind of planning commission we shall set up to harness the "billion wild horses" of a machine age, but whether we seriously intend that they shall work for the use of workers rather than the profit of private owners.\(^{141}\)

The real revolution will come when men work for society as they now work for absentee owners. This will only happen though, when society in general embraces a new loyalty. In other days, men have embraced loyalties to empire or church.


\(^{141}\)Thomas, As I See It, p. 87. Also Thomas, "Capitalism Will Not Plan," The New Republic, LXVII (August 12, 1931), 339.
or nation when these loyalties were consciously urged by men with vision and understanding. Today the loyalty of brotherhood can likewise be accepted by society at large when urged by men with similar vision and understanding.¹⁴²

Societies and governments go wrong most often not in the handling of complex problems but in the relatively simple field of moral issues. "It is on moral discrimination that peace or war, the nature of peace after war, fraternity between races, even the correct distribution of the national income primarily depend."¹⁴³ To be a Socialist is primarily a moral choice because it involves a free decision to work for the organization of society on the basis of the principle of cooperation.

Socialism is not, for Thomas, just devotion to the good of men and it is not guilty of the unreality of talking spiritual values to hungry men when hunger can be overcome. No high devotion absolves men from the necessity for planning and organizing to carry out social programs or from the

¹⁴² Thomas, America's Way Out, p. 142.

¹⁴³ Thomas, A Socialist's Faith, pp. 157-158.
Thomas' approach to solving the problems of society was by no means exclusively on the level of promoting the ideal of cooperation. Just as, in his opposition to war, he advocated programs both for the prevention of particular wars and for the abolition of the war system, so, in his socialism, he worked both for immediate steps to meet immediate problems of poverty and unemployment and for the real cure that was socialism.

Thomas devoted much of his energy to the immediate problems of poverty, injustice, and unemployment. Through his work on behalf of labor unions, through his bringing to national attention the plight of the victims of the present social order (in the 1930's Thomas was largely responsible for making the term "share-cropper" a nationally recognized term as he exposed the conditions of tenant farmers in the South, especially in Arkansas), and through his popularizing of the "immediate demands" of the Socialist platforms on which he ran, Thomas sought to keep socialism as much concerned with daily bread as with the future cooperative.

144 Ibid., pp. 184, 208.

harmful of human liberties that the material security it might be able to provide is not worth the cost. Thomas insisted that the organization of society with central economic planning be "consistent with considerable decentralization and true democratic control," especially of the administrative process.\footnote{Thomas, \textit{Socialism on the Defensive}, p. 226.} and that the preservation of civil liberties is absolutely essential.\footnote{Ibid., p. 227.}

The means to be used to establish a socialist society cannot be violence or class war. Violence reduces our capacity for constructive cooperation and democracy, the very bases of a good socialist society: "It is the tragedy of history that lovers of liberty and justice have always blunted the edge of their own idealism, sown the seeds of new oppressions, debased the shining cities of their dreams by the wholesale violence that they have felt obliged to use."\footnote{Thomas, \textit{As I See It}, pp. 57-58; Thomas \textit{Autobiography}, p. 251; Thomas, "Conclusion," in Harry W. Laidler and Norman Thomas (eds.), \textit{The Socialism of Our Times} (New York, 1929), p. 375.}
A socialism that is desirable can be achieved only by educating men to the realization that they have the ability and power to make a better society and that they must do this through democratic means, not through violence.

The philosophy of a successful socialism must find a way to use the appeal to the potential power of the organized might of masses heretofore exploited both as workers and as consumers and to add to it an appeal to good will, without which no philosophy of impersonal forces, no hate of a master class, and no organization for the transfer of power can establish the fellowship of free men which is our goal. 150

Socialist politics was for Thomas largely educational, educational in the sense that the campaigns were run to spread the idea of democratic socialism. Eventually, the idea of building a socialist society would become strong enough to give real power to a new political party for which the Socialist Party was laying the foundation and supplying the philosophy. The only acceptable means to socialism in America is the ballot. Thomas waged six campaigns for the presidency:

because of an honest conviction that I could, better than in any other way, further two related causes dear to my heart: the education of the public in democratic socialism and the realignment of American...

150 Thomas, America's Way Out, p. 146.
political parties so that our political divisions would be meaningful and we should have genuine party responsibility. 151

Despite the complete failure of Thomas and the Socialist Party to build a strong socialist political movement in the United States, Thomas remained convinced that socialism is essential to real social progress. True social reform, Thomas insisted, needs a strong and consciously asserted ethical principle that will serve as the conscience and unifying principle of reform movements. Democratic socialism offers such a principle when it "insists that society's goal is fellowship of free men who will cooperate to use man's marvelous powers and the riches of his resources for the universal conquest of war, poverty and tyranny." 152

Because he saw the work of the Socialist Party as primarily educational and because he believed it necessary to insist upon the principle of socialism if reform move-

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ments are to have the necessary unifying ethical principle to accomplish truly lasting reforms, Thomas insisted that the end of socialism should not be ignored in favor of immediate reforms:

The problem of the relation of immediate gains to the ultimate goal will always be difficult. Men cannot postpone eating until they feast in Utopia. But if a farmer-labor party remains long on the plane of a merely reformist party, even if it be relatively class conscious, it will fail more disastrously than the German Social Democrats.153

Reforms take place within the economic system of capitalism that is basically immoral and universal; no real solution will come about until the system is replaced by socialism. A radical political movement that emphasizes its reformist side much more than its revolutionary side can all too easily lose sight of its ideals and original faith in the pursuit of immediate political results. A political movement, especially as it achieves some measure of success at the polls, must inevitably become involved in the procrastination and compromise that are part of contemporary political action. This political atmosphere is almost too enervating for firm resolution; "the psychology and the practical effect

of political action both upon those in office and the rank
and file are not favorable to that decisive action which is
essential for effective revolution. 154 American Socialists
must learn from the experience of Europe and attempt to keep
from being so dazzled by electoral success or the achieve-
ment of some reforms that they lose sight of the goal; it is
necessary to keep clearly before the eyes the true ends and
ideals of socialism. Only by keeping these ends in the fore-
front can Socialists educate people in the principles and
ideals of socialism (giving hope for the growth of socialism)
and inspire reformers with the proper perspective for real
reform. One does not inspire desire for the cooperative com-
monwealth by focusing all efforts on immediate reforms. 155

It is necessary for a party or a movement that wants
to be politically responsible to concern itself with what is
in the realm of the possible. Socialism must concern itself
with the possible; it is not necessary, however, to concern
oneself politically only with what is probable or easily

154 Thomas, "Is Peaceful Revolution Possible?" The
World Tomorrow, XV (September 14, 1932), 251-252.

155 Ibid., p. 253. See also Thomas to Editor, The
World-Telegram, April 22, 1932 (Thomas Papers).
accomplished or what can be accomplished without some re-
education of citizens. 156

Norman Thomas was an ethical socialist. Socialism
was, for him, the economic expression of the necessary vir-
tues of cooperation and justice that men must live by if they
expect improved conditions in society. Socialism is to be
spread through the education of people in the realization
that it is better than any other economic system. It is
better economically as well as ethically; under socialism one
can expect increased production and employment as well as
more adequate guarantees of the material security of individ-
ual citizens. For Thomas the old dispute among socialists
whether the appeal should be scientific or ethical has been
dropped. "It must be both." 157 There is no conflict be-
tween what is economically best and what is ethically best.
The ethical nature of Thomas' socialism is shown
very clearly when it is seen in contrast to Marxist social-
ism. The differences between Marxism and ethical socialism

156 Thomas, We Have A Future, p. 77.
157 Thomas, Socialism Re-examined, p. 30.
can usefully be understood in terms of the Marxist materialist conception of history.

Historical materialism means that the production and distribution of material goods and not the realm of ideas is the determinant factor in history. The relationship between history and ideology (by which Marx meant conceptions, ideas -- morality, religion, metaphysics) is clearly discussed in *The German Ideology*. The *German Ideology*, originally conceived as a refutation of Max Stirner's work, *The Ego and His Own*, became a general attack on the Young Hegelian movement (including Bauer and Feuerbach as well as Stirner); it was a full rejection of any ideological interpretation of history which is based on a dialectic of ideas divorced from the social-economic realities in which those ideas originate.

The Young Hegelians wanted, Marx said, to reform reality through changing ideas. This whole approach is mistaken. For Marx, ideas are reformed through the changing of reality. To attack man's "religious phantoms" with other brain phantoms, as Bauer and his friends do, is to show a basic misunderstanding of history. It is not what men think or imagine that determine history; ideology, rather, depends upon material production and material commerce. "Life is
not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.\textsuperscript{158}

The factors that shape the reality which makes history are these: the production of means of subsistence, the creation of new needs, the first social unit that is the family, and the division of labor that extends beyond the family with the increase of production. These are the four basic factors; only after these comes consciousness. Consciousness is not an independent factor; consciousness is dependent upon language and language is the result of social relations, which, in turn, depend upon material production.\textsuperscript{159}

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of the material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. -- real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the

\textsuperscript{158}Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, \textit{The German Ideology} (New York, 1939), p. 15.

Intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms.\textsuperscript{160}

As society developed, consciousness appeared as more independent. The division between mental and physical labor severed consciousness from its vital source, the process of life production; this division has produced intellectuals and speculative philosophies. Yet even the most abstract speculation is deeply rooted in the material conditions of life.

Ideas are closely tied to the economic structure of society, the class structure:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore the ideas of its dominance.\textsuperscript{161}

Idealists like the Young Hegelians err in that they

\textsuperscript{160}\textit{Marx and Engels, op. cit.}, pp. 13-14.

\textsuperscript{161}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 39.
abstract ideas from the class in which they originated and attribute an independent existence to them. This is not only an inadequate attempt to reform society, it is actually serving the interests of the ruling class by giving ideas a semblance of independent reality. Society cannot be measurably improved by attempting to change ideas; the only real progress can be made through the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which gave rise to the ideas of society — "not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history, also of religion, of philosophy and all other types of theory." 162

Consciousness, revolution, and socialism are all inextricably tied to the class structure. It is true that the "existence of revolutionary ideas in a particular period presupposes the existence of a revolutionary class;" 163 it is also true that class consciousness and solidarity with the proletariat, the modern revolutionary class, are the necessary steps if one wishes to contribute to the coming of socialism. The materialist conception of history provides

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162 Ibid., p. 29.
163 Ibid., p. 40.
the key to understanding world history; the notion of class conflict points the way to the mechanics of the theory.

Class consciousness is an essential ingredient in the coming socialist revolution, which will come inevitably. When a revolutionary consciousness exists among the proletariat, then the revolution will come. Without the revolutionary consciousness, the proletariat will not initiate a successful revolution. Avineri expresses well the Marxian point of view:

If, however, the proletariat is still unaware of its own historical position, if it does not possess an adequate world view, then the objective conditions by themselves will not create the revolution until and unless the proletariat grasps that by changing its own view of the world it also changes it. 164

One who truly wishes to make socialism a reality should be spreading the consciousness of the class conflict; proletariat class consciousness, not ethical appeals, will lead to socialism.

Marx's exposition of historical materialism led to a critique of all nonscientific forms of socialism. The German Ideology included a criticism of "German socialism" and in

The Communist Manifesto Marx devoted the entire third section to a critique of other forms of socialism. This criticism of other socialisms was necessary because, according to Marx, non-scientific socialists hindered rather than helped the cause of socialism. The success of socialism depends completely on the awareness, among the working class, of both the revolution and of socialism. All nonscientific forms of socialism attempt to reform society according to the ideals of some social reformer and accomplish nothing more than slowing down the inevitable course of history. Nonscientific socialism is a waste of time and effort; only the scientific understanding of the dynamics of society can inspire the class consciousness that brings the revolution nearer.

All socialism that is not based on the materialist conception of history is utopian; it will not be able to achieve its goal. "The Socialism of earlier days certainly criticized the existing capitalistic mode of production and its consequences. But it could not explain them, and, therefore, could not get the mastery of them. It could only simply reject them as bad." 165 Utopian socialists suffer from

the illusion that moral and legal principles are controlling factors in society. It was Marx's contribution to socialism, say Marxists, that he did not confront the world with what ought to be; rather he showed, through the discovery and analysis of the economic factor in history, the end toward which society was inevitably moving.

It is evident from the above that Marx's historical materialism is the key to the vast differences that exist between Marxist socialism and socialism that is essentially ethical in inspiration and orientation. Ethical socialism opposes capitalism because the capitalistic system is seen as unjust and as a violation of the principles by which men should live to achieve justice. Ethical socialists work for the establishment of socialism through the spread of the conviction that justice requires socialism. They do not think that the proper way to socialism is through class conflict and revolution; hatred and violence are in opposition to the ethical ideals of brotherhood and love. Marxism, on the other hand, does not expect socialism to be established through right thinking individuals. Ethical principles are not independent factors determining the course of history. The real movement toward socialism is dependent upon economic
factors that have already set in motion a development that will inevitably end in socialism. The achievement of socialism is to be accomplished through proletarian class consciousness, not through appeals for justice. Rather than worry about class conflict and revolution as violating ethical ideals, Marxism sees them as historically necessary and sees the ethical principles as an expression of the interests of the ruling class. Socialism will be achieved not by ethical language, but by the realization that it is an historical necessity.

Thomas himself was quite explicit in acknowledging that he was not a Marxist when he came to the Party: "Certainly I was no anti-Marxist when I joined the Party, but mine, like much English socialism, was non-Marxist."

Thomas never became a Marxist though he did, in the early 1930's, have more sympathy for Marxism than was true for the periods before or after. The relationship of Thomas to Marxism is best indicated by examining the attitude Thomas took toward the Marxist economic interpretation of history.

166 Thomas, A Socialist's Faith, p. 6.

167 Ibid.
and the accompanying doctrine of the class conflict.

In the early 1930's, Thomas found the doctrine of historical materialism very useful: "The economic interpretation of history is the most useful single theory we have for historical interpretation and forecast." 168 Yet the theory is useful only so long as it is not carried over to the realm of metaphysics or of absolute scientific law. There, it simply doesn't work -- partly because as we have seen it expresses a tendency subject to unpredictable modifications by inherited ideas and institutions, partly because it ignores or does not explain psychological factors which are the essence of human nature, and partly because the very terms it employs: "determinism," "materialistic," etc.; match the physics and the biology of the nineteenth century but not of the twentieth. 169

In other words, the Marxist conception of history is not adequate to support the weight given it by Marxists. Not only is it mistaken to give to it the meaning of metaphysical materialism that it had acquired from the time of the late Engels on; it is also mistaken to think of it, as Marx himself did, as the complete and satisfactory explanation of historical developments. Even in the early 1930's, Thomas

168 Thomas, As I See It, p. 17.
169 Thomas, America's Way Out, p. 137.
did not accept the economic interpretation of history to the extent that he would, for example, think that an ethical appeal to socialism is mistaken or counterproductive.

Thomas, a decade later, again pointed out that the usefulness of historical materialism was limited. While the Marxist theory has been exceedingly fruitful, its usefulness has been limited by the fact that Marxists, beginning with Marx himself, "treated productive forces as a sufficient explanation of history, instead of as a primary factor conditioning all others." A serious consequence, Thomas continued, of "this confusion of effective cause with indispensable condition has been the Marxist tendency to ignore human psychology." Marx's science of history is useful if it is treated as one method of getting at the truth, not the sole method.

Thomas suspected that Marx himself would not have objected to the development of a metaphysical materialism in Marxism. Certainly Marx's historical materialism is too one-sided to produce a full understanding of human behavior.

170 Thomas, We Have A Future, p. 104.
171 Ibid.
"We need a better, not a worse, science of human history and conduct than Marx gave us. But that science cannot omit, as did Marx's--and even more conspicuously Lenin's--frank recognition of and appeal to human values." 172

Writing in A Socialist's Faith, in 1951, Thomas concludes a consideration of a century's development of theories about mankind thus:

One conclusion, however, is immediately valid. The attempt to establish an amoral science of economics like the science of physics, independent of psychology and ethics but yet basic to them, has failed. Man makes his own economics as well as his own history on the basis of other factors in addition to the tools he invents and uses in earning his living. 173

A primary reason for rejecting any theory of economic determinism is that there is no evidence that man is determined. To Thomas, it is clear that "there is in human conduct an element of will and of choice." 174 The great goals of freedom and democracy are meaningless unless there is a degree of freedom. "If there is any freedom of will, the prob-

172 Ibid., p. 105.
173 Thomas, A Socialist's Faith, p. 117.
174 Ibid., p. 118.
lem of achieving a more desirable social order, is in the last analysis profoundly ethical. Thomas cannot accept any interpretation of the development of history that does not accept the importance and significance of conscious choices. Man builds his own world, at least partially, and an element in determining the type of social order that he is building is his choice of conscious ideals and principles. As was made clear in our earlier discussion of Thomas' socialism, the most important thing in the building of a better world is for men to have the right values and loyalties and to hold them in the right order of priority.

Thomas' attitude toward the doctrine of class conflict was similar to his attitude toward historical materialism: the doctrine is useful for understanding the situation that exists in the capitalistic system, but cannot be accepted in the strictest Marxist sense.

In the early 1930's, Thomas wrote: "I believe not only in the obvious fact of struggle between groups with conflicting economic interest, but in the class struggle between

175 Ibid.
an owning and a working class. 176 The doctrine of the class struggle means, for Thomas, simply that this conflict of interest does exist in society on the basis of economic classes. Class consciousness in itself is not to be considered a goal. "But I protest when certain self-proclaimed Marxists act as if to believe in the class struggle was a kind of mystic act of salvation by faith." 177 Class solidarity of workers should be taught; it is the first step in applying the principle of cooperation. When the workers have begun to feel their real relationship with other workers regardless of nationality or race, then an important first step has been taken by the workers toward acceptance of a system based on cooperation rather than competition. The conflict between the owning class and the working class is a fact of life; working class solidarity should be encouraged; class solidarity is a goal not because working class consciousness is the way to the socialist revolution but because it indicates a beginning of the change in loyalties from individualism to cooperation that will eventually bring about the.

176 Thomas, As I See It, p. 17.
177 Ibid.
In *We Have A Future*, published in 1941, Thomas makes it perfectly clear that while he accepts the fact of the class conflict ("based on the difference in interest between those who own productive property and think of themselves primarily as owners, and those who have only their labor to sell"), he is convinced that nothing can be gained and that much can be lost by making faith in the class struggle a chief principle of socialist thought and action.

Clearly, then, to get what we want with a minimum of destruction both of order and liberty requires emphasis on what ought to unite us, or what we can do together, in the society we might win, not on the divisions which breed hate. To recognize the existence of the class conflict is helpful especially if it stimulates us to remove its causes. But to believe that the stimulation of instinctive class hate, alongside of, or instead of, national and racial hate, will save mankind is madness.

Thomas wanted to bring an end to the class conflict not through the dialectical method of accentuating it but by emphasizing what unites instead of what separates and by inspiring cooperation.

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179 Thomas, "We Have A Future," p. 106.
Leaf 207 omitted in page numbering
Thomas never became a Marxist because his view of the powers at work in the world was at odds with the Marxist. While recognizing that it is "class conflict as a necessary condition of the ultimate formation of a classless society which was and is the emotional heart of Marxism," he gave his socialism a very different emotional heart—the ethical ideal of cooperation. Class conflict was a reality for Thomas, but it was not the fundamental reality. Understanding the division of a society into an owning class and a working class is necessary for understanding society, but that realization does not yet get to the fundamental issue of what is wrong with society. This division exists because men have chosen to live according to the wrong values.

Understanding the class conflict is important for understanding the values on which society has been organized, but neither the class conflict nor the values that brought it about (pursuit of private profit) are essential. Men are capable of changing their values and of changing the society inspired by their earlier loyalties. Thus, while Marxists emphasize the extent to which social-historical developments are determined by the material-economic factors, Thomas stressed the power of right ideas, values, attitudes, and the fact of human freedom. Thomas never

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became a Marxist because of his profound faith in the ability of men, once the desirability of socialism has been taught, to transcend individual and class interests.

This analysis of Thomas' social thought during his years as leader of the Socialist Party of America has not revealed a very clear picture of what he thought the socialist society, the cooperative commonwealth, would look like. Thomas had much to say about the principles on which society should be reorganized, but did not spell out in detail the economic reorganization of the new society. As was indicated earlier in the chapter, he thought that the principles of cooperation and democracy, when applied, would involve the social ownership of land, natural resources, and the principal means of production and distribution. It would also involve central economic planning with effective control, but only that type of central planning organization that was compatible with true democracy. It was not the working out of the details of the socialist society that was Thomas' primary interest, but the principles and values and loyalties that were to be insisted upon as the detailed working out of the vision took place. Thomas' socialism consisted of principles of social ethics, not of a blueprint for social reorganization.

Thomas was never very successful as a presidential candidate. After receiving some 267,000 votes in 1928, he more than tripled his total to 884,781 in 1932. That was the peak number of votes he ever received, however. He ran four more times, with the following results: 1936 - 187,342 votes;
The decline after 1932 was more dramatic than the surge forward between 1928 and 1932. Despite the hopes of the early 1930's, the Socialist Party under Thomas remained very weak.

In view of Thomas' continuing and unsuccessful efforts in small party politics, it provides further insight into the nature of his Socialist philosophy to consider his reactions to the highly successful practical politics of President Franklin Roosevelt and to the political "realism" of Reinhold Niebuhr, who left the Socialist Party for more practical political endeavors at the end of the 1930's.

Thomas was a critic of the New Deal. Acknowledging that some of President Roosevelt's programs were helpful in meeting the immediate problems of hunger and extreme poverty, Thomas nevertheless felt that they were not contributing to the ultimate solution of economic problems. The New Deal was "simply an attempt to save the unsatisfactory system of capitalism; Roosevelt's "main reliance has been state capitalism, that is a degree of government regulation of economic enterprise for the sake of bolstering up the profit system." The New Deal, though better than "purier" forms of capitalism, was an attempt to save the immoral economically unsound system of capitalism at a time when it would have been possible to move the country toward socialism.

183 Thomas, After the New Deal, What?, p. 16.
President Roosevelt was the recipient of most of Thomas' criticisms in the 1936, 1940, and 1944 presidential campaigns. Though Thomas, in his role as Socialist candidate, severely criticized most leaders of both major parties, his criticism of President Roosevelt seemed to contain a bitterness that was lacking in his criticism of others. There are a number of reasons, no doubt, for this bitterness. The New Deal was a successful attempt to save capitalism at the very time when Thomas' hopes for the future of socialism were highest; many Socialists and most perspective Socialists flocked to the support of Roosevelt; Thomas was convinced that policy pursued by Roosevelt from 1937 on would involve the United States in a world war. Though these reasons were present, it seems that what antagonized Thomas most about the President was his political opportunism. Thomas was angered over Roosevelt's inaction or delayed action in a number of cases where, Thomas felt, morality demanded swift, principled action. Thomas had been instrumental in uncovering the corruption of the New York City Democratic government when Roosevelt was Governor of New York State and had highlighted the share-cropping injustices in states where Democrats were in control during Roosevelt's presidential administration. These were two of the cases in which Thomas felt, Roosevelt failed to serve justice out of fear of antagonizing political supporters.

Thomas had little sympathy for a political program
that was almost totally lacking in philosophy.

The essence of the Socialist position is its philosophy. It was, the President's admirers told us, his virtue that he was not burdened with a philosophy and therefore he could more easily find out what play would work. 184

Roosevelt's pride in his practical political ability (He once told Thomas: "I'm a damn sight better politician than you are." 185) suggested to Thomas that political power meant more to the President than principle. Thomas' bitterness toward Roosevelt is probably largely the result of the fact that he thought of the President's policies as so many victories of political opportunism over principle. 186 The pursuit of political power as an end in itself was as repugnant to Thomas as it was to the editors of The World Tomorrow, who wrote regarding the resignation of Paul Blanshard from the Socialist Party in 1933 to help the La Guardia mayoralty campaign in New York City:

Mr. Blanshard declares that "a political party is not a church, which is based chiefly upon idealism and righteousness; it is an aggregation of citizens to exercise political power." This sentence is a complete revelation of Mr. Blanshard's political and ethical confusion. If a political party is designed for the purpose of exercising power, the question still remains: Power for what purpose? Mr. Blanshard seems to infer that power is desirable for its own sake, and that if the purpose for which it is desired is incompatible with its immediate attainment, it is logical and necessary to sacrifice the

184 Thomas, The Choice Before Us, p. 34.
185 Thomas, Autobiography, p. 150.
186 Ibid., p. 143.
purpose so that the party may come into office. 187

Thomas often said that he would rather be right than president but that he was perfectly willing to be both.

There is much to substantiate the first part of that claim. In the 1944 Presidential campaign Thomas received the lowest number of votes that he received in any of his six presidential campaigns; yet it was the 1944 campaign that Thomas pointed to with the greatest pride. He was convinced that the policies and principles that the Socialist Party espoused in that campaign (especially regarding the ending of the war and the establishment of peace after the war) were, above all others, vindicated by history and the opinions of thoughtful men. 188

Being more interested in being right than President, Thomas' Socialist Party campaigns were more concerned with spreading the principles to be used to achieve peace, freedom, and plenty than with the pursuit of political power. Thomas would not sacrifice principles for power; neither did he think power could only be achieved through such a sacrifice.


188 See Thomas, Socialism Re-examined, p. 127.
His differences with Reinhold Niebuhr indicate his refusal to be "realistic" politically.

In 1932, Thomas wrote a critical review of Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. While acknowledging that there were very many excellent points in the book and that Niebuhr's challenge to some of the easy assumptions of superficial pacifism was a real service, Thomas felt that Niebuhr's analysis was misdirected ("But after all, there are not many people who suffer from sentimental pacifism." 189). The book struck Thomas as unnecessarily defeatist about the possibility of progress in social justice.

If Mr. Niebuhr made his case that there could be no more hope than he indicates, there might be nothing more to do but to accept the bitter truth. He does not make his case. One may admit practically everything he says about human society and yet stoutly maintain that it does not in sum total prove that man is incapable of working toward immense betterment of society without a faith in impossible perfection or that the faith in perfection as a possibility necessarily leads to bitter fanaticism. I agree with the author that education has its limitations as a means of redemption. He has not proved that education cannot help men to visualize and to realize a degree of progress which it does lie within the power of humanity to achieve. 190


In short, Thomas was not willing to admit with Niebuhr that ethical appeals are ineffectual in moving men toward social justice and that a man is a fanatic who truly believes that society can approach a cooperative commonwealth of peace, freedom, and justice.

Niebuhr's realism eventually led him out of the Socialist Party, though he remained convinced of democratic socialism as an ideal and was chairman of the liberal Union for Democratic Action (which later became the Americans for Democratic Action). In 1944, Thomas wrote to Niebuhr an open letter, asking him and other members of the U. D. A. why they were supporting the Democratic Party. Niebuhr's reply read, in part:

Let me say at once the members of the Union for Democratic Action long ago abandoned the "Utopia or bust" position in politics....

I remind you again that the battles ahead will not be contests between unmitigated evil and absolute good, and that a true perspective of the struggles of our time cannot be had from the Olympian heights of Socialist dogma.

If you are contemptuous of the differences between a Roosevelt and a Dewey, between a Congressman...

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who voted against, and one who voted for fortification of Guam; between a Senator who opposed subsidies and one who supported them, between men who wanted a federal ballot for soldier vote, between man who, whatever their limitations, have some grasp of the big issues and forces of the modern world, and men who have no ideas, no plans, only a longing for "normalcy"; in short, you shun the daily skirmishes and belittle the modest gains which are the stuff of politics; then you -- not me -- are "throwing away your vote" on those decisions affecting the course of the war and the nature of the peace.192

Thomas and Niebuhr differed essentially on who their working for the Kingdom on earth was a reasonable position for a political reformer to take. Their differences of opinion, it might be noted, did not place them at the opposite ends of the political spectrum. Niebuhr, though very critical of Thomas' approach, was himself a social reformer and a social activist. Thomas, though approaching politics on the basis of ethical principles, was very desirous of being politically responsible and relevant. It was the difference in their expectations for men and for society that led them to take different approaches. Niebuhr insisted that one must be "realistic" in his social and political expectations; Thomas continued to cry out for the better world. Thomas was not satisfied with the small gains to be accomplished by the election of a Roosevelt over a Dewey (which, according to Niebuhr, was about all one could hope to accomplish in practical politics). Always hopeful that men could rise above selfishness, pragmatism, and opportunism, Norman Thomas remained a Social Gospel politician.

192 Reinhold Niebuhr, The Call (September 8, 1944), p. 5.
Long after Niebuhr came to insist that men must drastically lower their expectations.
IV

THOMAS AND CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICS

1. Introduction

The preceding analysis of Norman Thomas' social philosophy has made it abundantly clear that he never fully abandoned the form of Christian ethics that gave shape to his early social vision. Social Gospel Protestantism taught Thomas that men were called to transform the present world into the Kingdom of God on earth. It taught him also that the Kingdom consisted of peace, individual liberty, and socialism and that the Kingdom could only be achieved through the use of means which were in themselves peaceful and democratic. These were lessons Thomas never forgot.

As the previous chapter of this study has indicated, Thomas' later life can be described as the seeking of a secular version of the Social Gospel Kingdom. He no longer talked about the establishment of the Kingdom
of God on earth, but he continued to insist that only a
democratic socialism in a world of peace was the proper
expression of man's true humanity. His continuing
dedication to both the goals and the means of the Social/
Gospel kept him from making peace with the contemporary
social order (as did many American pragmatists) or with a
violent revolutionary approach to socialism (in the manner
of Marxists). His particular form of Christian ethics
remained the key ingredient in Thomas' thought even when
he was no longer a Christian.

One task remains to complete this study. We have
seen the political and social expression of Thomas'
Christian ethics; we need now to situate Thomas in the
history of Christian ethics. This has been a study of
Thomas' Christian ethics, its background, its explicit
presentation, and its continuing importance after Thomas
abandoned other aspects of Christianity. The study is
concluded by considering the significance of Thomas' ethics as it relates to other interpretations of how to
be a Christian in society.
2. Thomas' Christian Social Ethics

Thomas' understanding of how to be a Christian in society could be compared with that of others on a variety of questions and doctrinal presuppositions: on, for example, attitudes toward messianism or utopianism, on questions of war and peace, on the extent to which men should be considered corrupted by the Fall. In a sense, though, all of these concerns are simply different parts of one basic question, the question of the relationship of man (in society) to God. This relationship of man can be referred to in different ways; it is the relationship between the historical and the divine, the relationship between nature and grace, the relationship between natural ethics and Christian ethics. A key issue in Christian social ethics is the question of society's potential for Christianization. Is human society to be organized on the basis of Christian ideals or is it necessary, because by no means all men in society can be expected to live according the Christian principles, to have social institutions function on the basis of other ethical principles?
Is it foolish or is it wise to think that human society can and should follow the love ethics that is often proposed for Christians? The answers one gives to these questions go a long way toward determining the nature of his social ethics. If he considers the Christian ethical ideal totally beyond the possibility of large social groups, then he is not going to propose ethical standards for society that are the simple application of the love ethic to all human institutions and problems. If, on the other hand, one sees men and human institutions as naturally capable of achieving much of the Christian ideal, then the goal of Christian social ethics tends to be the Christianizing of all aspects of society. In this case, there is no real difference between the ethical standards proposed for the Christian individual and those proposed for society.

Over the centuries, various positions have been taken by Christian ethicists on this key issue. H. Richard Niebuhr, in his Christ and Culture,1 outlined five typical responses of Christians in the history of

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1H. Richard Niebuhr; Christ and Culture. (New York, 1956).
the Western church to the culture in which they found themselves. This is Niebuhr's attempt to make an improvement upon the famous church-and-sect distinction that was first fully developed by Ernst Troeltsch. The church-and-sect dichotomy, to simplify, distinguishes those religious movements which accommodate themselves to society from those religious movements which refuse to so accommodate themselves. Niebuhr's more refined typology provides a valuable framework in which to relate Thomas' ethics to that of other Christians.

The first type of Christian response to society and culture is one of opposition. Christianity is seen as opposed to the society and the human achievements of the society in which the Christian lives. "The counterpart of loyalty to Christ and the brothers is the rejection of cultural society; a clear line of separation is drawn between the brotherhood of the children of God and the world." 2 The authority of Christ over the Christian is uncompromisingly affirmed and culture's claim to loyalty is resolutely rejected. Whatever does not belong to the commonwealth of Christ, where the believers live, is under the rule of evil. For Christians

who espouse this understanding of the relationship between Christ and culture, there is no hope to Christianize society, or even to improve it; men must be saved out of society, apart from civilization, in obedience to the laws of Christ, and in pursuit of a perfection wholly distinct from the aims that men seek in politics and economics, in sciences and arts. The Mennonites have come to represent the attitude most purely, since they not only renounce all participation in politics and refuse to be drawn into military service, but follow their own distinctive customs and regulations in economics and education.3

The second of Niebuhr's typical answers is quite the opposite: a recognition of a fundamental agreement between Christianity and culture. To this group Jesus appears as the epitome of human culture; his values are regarded as the greatest human achievement. The work of Christ is conceived of as the training of men for a better life in society. Christians of this sort "feel no great tension between church and world, the social laws and the Gospel, the workings of divine grace and human effort, the ethics of salvation and the ethics of social conservation or progress."4 They do not necessarily

3 _Ibid._, p. 56

4 _Ibid._, p. 83
provide a Christian sanction for all of prevailing culture, but only for what they regard as the best of human culture. Niebuhr proposes as examples of this position the liberal theology of men like A. Ritchl and the Social Gospel of Americans like Walter Rauschenbusch. It is possible for society to become Christianized; in fact, some progress has already been made in that direction.

The other three typical answers are attempts to find a middle position between the two that have just been outlined. The third type is called "Christ above culture". Christianity is seen by these Christians, in agreement with the second group, as the fulfillment of cultural aspirations. Yet there is something in Christianity that neither arises out of culture nor contributes directly to it. Christianity is discontinuous as well as continuous with social life and culture. Culture leads men to Christ, yet only in so preliminary a fashion that a great leap is necessary if men are to reach him or, better, true culture is not possible unless beyond human achievement.
all human search for values, all human society, Christ enters into life from above with gifts which human aspiration has not envisioned and which human effort cannot attain unless he relates men to a supernatural society and a new value-center.

Thomas Aquinas is an outstanding example of this approach. On the question of the relationship between ethics and politics, Aquinas did not try to find a rule for human social life in the Gospels but neither did he deny that civil society must be governed by the same ethical principles that are to govern the lives of Christians. Christians are expected to do more. Christianity goes beyond the natural-law obligations that can be known by reason. But these principles remain the ethical obligations for both individuals and society.

The fourth type is also an example of a middle way between the first and the second. Whereas the third position was in agreement with the second that cultural life has a certain positive value of its own, the fourth is in agreement with the first that human culture

5Ibid., p. 42.
is corrupt. This group of Christians disagrees with the first, however, in that it believes that Christianity demands "obedience to the institutions of society and loyalty to its members as well as obedience to a Christ who sits in judgment on that society." This type of Christian (the dualist) agrees with the radical Christian (first type) that the whole world of human culture is sinful; the difference is that the dualist knows that he belongs to that culture and cannot get out of it as the radical attempts to do. Thus:

man is seen as subject to two moralities, and as a citizen of two worlds that are not only discontinuous with each other but largely opposed. In the polarity and tension of Christ and culture life must be lived precariously and sinfully in the hope of a justification which lies beyond history.

Luther is the greatest representative of this type of Christian social ethics.

The fifth position probably comes closer to mediating the two extremes than does either the third

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p. 43
of the fourth. It is in agreement with the first and the fourth that human nature is perverted and that this perversion permeates the culture and is transmitted through it. Thus there is an opposition between Christianity and all human institutions and customs. Yet, "Christ is seen as the converter of man in his culture and society, not apart from these, for there is no nature without culture and no turning from self and idols to God save in society." It is possible to permeate all of life by the Gospels. Through the conversion of men from sinfulness to the service of God, the Kingdom of God permeates the whole of our social existence. By changing men, culture is changed. Not alone presents among others, Calvin and, on the American scene, Jonathan Edwards, as spokesmen for this type of relationship between Christianity and society. There is no full distinction between ethics and politics; the whole effort is the transformation of all of society through the conversion of individuals.

Ibid.
Niebuhr's typology indicates something of the range of approaches that Christian thinkers have taken on the relationship of human works to godliness. These are, of course, only types and it is not possible to fit the thought of many individuals to any one of these types fully. Nevertheless, it is a useful scheme for relating Thomas' ethics to that of other Christians.

The notion of the Kingdom of God in the Social Gospel clearly identifies that version of the Christian gospel as a "Christ of Culture" position. Christ and men working together would establish the Kingdom on earth. Jesus was the guide, who would lead men to realize the proper values and transform society on the basis of those values. God works for the Kingdom within human society rather than working on it from without; he works through Christ and through conscience. What Niebuhr says about the second type is clearly true of the Social Gospel: "the great work of Christ may be conceived as the training of men in their present social existence for the better life to come." The teachings of Jesus were the Social Gospel blueprint for establishing the Kingdom on earth; Norman Thomas accepted this Social Gospel.

Thomas also had something in common with the fifth of Niebuhr's approaches. To some extent, he emphasized the necessity for conversion as a means of achieving the

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*Ibid*, p. 34.
Christianization of society; his political campaigns were aimed at changing the values of the individuals that make up American society. Thomas tended to equate Christianity with a particular type of social organization, but it was a society that had not yet been achieved. His concept of the Kingdom of God on earth became the basis for a prophetic critique of present social institutions rather than for a defense of them; there was, thus, a strong conversionist element in Thomas' thought. Yet it would be a mistake to think that Thomas was as close to the fifth type as he was to the second. Christians of the conversionist school saw a much greater need for individual change than did Thomas. Man, in the Christ-the-transformer-of-culture motif, is not naturally capable of Christianizing culture; this occurs only when he has been regenerated in the knowledge of Christ. For Thomas, all men, even those outside of Christianity, are capable of working for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

To identify Norman Thomas as a member of the second of Niebuhr's groups is to say that he differed radically from those who adopted the first stance, a stance which also considered participation in war contrary to Christian principles. Christian pacifism is
not all of one type and a brief consideration of the differences between Thomas' political pacifism and the apolitical pacifism of Christian sects is important for understanding Thomas' place in Christian ethics.

Apolitical pacifism, whether the pacifism of pre-Constantinian Christianity or the sectarian Christianity of modern times, did not advocate pacifism as a practical means of improving this world. Christians refused to take part in war out of obedience to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, but without any hopes and expectations that war would be eliminated. The world as a whole was too distant from God, too sinful and unbelieving for pacifism as a practical policy. Evil must be restrained and restrained by force; this is the reality of the natural world of man. Christians, having been taken out of this natural world, have no part to play in this necessary coercion.

Apolitical pacifism is usually a reconciliation of two ideas. First, the whole world associated with the state and the exercise of civil authority is seen to be the world of evil, the result of sin. Christians should have nothing to do with such evil. On the other hand, civil government is an institution ordained by
Thus war is unacceptable for a Christian; he cannot take part in such evil. Yet, the world is too evil to expect that war should never be undertaken by non-Christian civil rulers.

Christian political pacifism tends to be a combination of four beliefs. First, God has made known to men the proper way to respond to the question of war: second, the proper response is the non-violence lived and taught by Jesus Christ; third, non-violence is an ethical obligation for governments as well as individuals, for non-believers as well as for Christians; fourth, the political practice of non-violence will lead to more peace and a better social order than the use of violence. Men, whether Christians or not, are capable of organizing society on the basis of pacifism and only this type of organization has the potential for producing good practical results. Abstention from war is demanded by Christianity; it is also demanded by practical human reasoning.

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It is obvious that the primary difference between political and apolitical pacifism is the opposing estimate of the extent to which the state can be ruled by Christian principles. Thomas' Christian ethics is indeed very far from the ethics of those who, like the Mennonites, are Christian apolitical pacifists.

It is easy to see that the first two of Niebuhr's types represent radically different forms of Christian social ethics. It is more difficult to compare the "Christ of culture" position to the three mediating orientations. In general, it appears as though the third ("Christ above culture") has more in common with the second than do either the fourth or the fifth.

In holding that Christianity is the fulfillment of what it means to be human and that the natural man can go a long way toward living a Christian life and developing a Christian culture, the "Christ above culture" form of ethics inspires high expectations regarding man's social behavior. By insisting that man naturally has an orientation toward grace and the supernatural, this position denies that there is a radical separation between man and God or between human society and the Kingdom of God. There is, then, some basis for social utopianism in
the "Christ above culture" motif. But this utopianism is kept from full growth by a conviction that man's moral goodness has been seriously weakened by the Fall and the insistence that nature and grace, though the second builds on the first, are not fully the same.

It has already been pointed out that Norman-Thomas had something in common with the fifth position as well as with the second. Nevertheless, taking the "Christ the transformer of culture" orientation as a whole, this type is not as close to the second as the one that had just been considered. The starting point is different (human nature and human culture are perverted), while the hope is similar (through the conversion of individuals, society can be Christianized). Christianity is not natural to man and it is not the natural man who can and will live according to the principles of Christianity; it is only the man who has been regenerated. This is a vision which may inspire utopian hopes, but the primary emphasis always remains on the need for conversion.
The mediating position most in disagreement with the "Christ of culture" approach is the fourth, "Christ and culture in paradox". The starting point is the perversion of human culture and there is no hope that the culture can ever be really Christianized. Even the regenerated man, though he must take some responsibility for the nature of human society, cannot expect to ever bring society to any kind of approximation of the Kingdom of God.

The use of Niebuhr's typology gives a clear indication of Thomas' place in the context of American Protestant social ethics. Though a pacifist, he differed radically from sectarian, apolitical Protestants. Though his Social Gospel thinking flows out of a tradition of American revivalism, he could not accept the need for regeneration articulated by a Jonathan Edwards. Though he sought to relate Christian ethics to practical politics, he did not agree with the interpretation of Protestant "realists" of what it meant to be practical.

The most important American Protestant critic of the American Protestant Social Gospel was Reinhold Niebuhr. A brief consideration of Niebuhr's "Christ and culture in paradox" theology will help to situate Thomas in relationship to other American Protestants, especially those who were influential during the generation of his leadership of the Socialist Party.
Reinhold Niebuhr rejected any form of Christianity that hoped for "an impossible combination of the divine and the historical."\(^{11}\) The only proper interpretation of messianism for Niebuhr is: "that the contradictions of history are not resolved in history, but they are ultimately resolved on the level of the eternal and the divine."\(^{12}\) There can be no Christianization of society. "In obvious contradiction to modern liberal interpretations of the power of love in history, Jesus discourages the hope that preaching of the gospel will banish evil from history."\(^{13}\)

For Reinhold Niebuhr, the world can never become Christian, the Kingdom of God will never be found in history. In general, man and human affairs must be seen as being more at odds with God and the divine than in conformity with them. There always remains an unbridgeable gap (unbridgeable from man's point of view) between creator and creature. Man remains finite and sinful and there is no way in which he can ever avoid the conflict and struggles, the compromises and imperfections of history.

\(^{11}\) Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II (London 1943), p. 23. The discussion of Niebuhr's theology is limited to a consideration of this major work.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 47.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 50.
The evil in the human situation arises from the fact that men seek to deny or to escape prematurely from the uncertainties of history and to claim a freedom, a transcendent and an eternal and universal perspective which is not possible for finite creatures.14

Any attempt to approach politics on the basis of a turn-the-other-check interpretation of Christian political ethics misunderstands or ignores, according to Niebuhr, the doctrine of original sin. The belief that good will and persuasions are the only proper tools of politics denies the fact that man's self-love and self-centeredness are inevitable.15 The desire to act politically on the basis of universal moral norms which men can naturally reason to is the result of an incomplete understanding of man's corruption. "The perennial mistake of rationalists, whether Stoic, Catholic or modern, is to exempt reason from either finiteness or sin or both and to derive universal rational norms from this confidence in reason."16

Niebuhr maintained that the Biblical dialectic (divine transcendence as well as divine immanence) is lost by theories that emphasize the potential unity of God and man and the will of God in human history.

14 Ibid., p. 3
15 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 279
16 Ibid., p. 301
The Christian theology that is represented by Reinhold Niebuhr emphasizes the distance between God and the created world. Man has been corrupted by sin; human reason has been corrupted. It is faith that saves and God who alone can bridge the natural estrangement of man from God. This understanding inclines one toward the position that the desire to build the Kingdom of God on earth or to see politics as an extension of private Christian morality as a denial of the true relationship of God and history. Man’s ability to build a better world is severely limited.

For Niebuhr, the proper ethical approach for society is the approach of the "political realist". Men must be seen as pursuing their self-interest in conflict with the self-interest of others; this is especially true of social groups. Therefore, the only responsible form of social philosophy is one that recognizes these conflicts and seeks to achieve some sort of balance of power and interests. The pursuit of the perfect society is dangerous because it misreads the moral potential of mankind.

The differences between Niebuhr and Thomas were very deep-seated, including different understandings of the potential of man to Christianize society and different estimates of the sinfulness of man. This look at Niebuhr highlights the great difference that exists among American Protestants in their ethical approaches.
As was suggested earlier in this chapter, the position closest to Thomas' is probably the third of H.R. Niebuhr's types, the "Christ above culture" position. This is a position found much more commonly among Roman Catholics than among Protestants.

Thomas Aquinas (to consider an outstanding example of the "Christ above culture" position) saw man as having a natural inclination toward God.

Supernatural grace is a perfecting of nature and a building on it; it is not defiance or in contradiction of the natural man. Man serves God by fulfilling his nature. 17

Aquinas' moral theology reflects this view of the closeness of the natural man to God. The natural moral law means, for Aquinas, that men are able, by rational reflection, to come to an understanding of what is good and what is evil. Moral laws are "natural" in the sense that they apply to all men and that correct moral conduct can be discovered through the use of natural reason. Aquinas did not accept the theory of two moralities, one for Christians and one for non-Christians, although he did think that Christians have, through grace, the ability to move beyond the level of non-Christians in moral conduct.

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Natural human virtue and Christian morality have much in common.

Aquinas' doctrine of original sin emphasized man's tendency to sin, but not his total corruption. The doctrine accepts a distinction between the essential character of man as man and the further gift of original justice which God has bestowed upon man in addition to his natural creation. In the Fall, the added gift was lost and, until restored by sacramental grace, men are subject to the limitations of their finite natures. Thus, original sin is the privation of something that does not belong to man as man and cannot be regarded as a corruption of his nature, though he is seriously injured by it.

Thus, original sin makes man's fulfillment of his nature more difficult. We cannot expect men to succeed fully in building the Kingdom of God on earth. This is true not because it is contrary to man's nature to do so, but because it has become difficult to fulfill his nature. Aquinas' doctrine of original sin emphasizes the limitations of man but it still sees man's perfection as possible.

Ibid., pp. 220 - 221.

Thus, for Aquinas, there is a great synthesis of philosophy and theology, state and church, civic and Christian virtues, natural and divine laws, Christianity and culture. Man is by nature oriented toward God; Christian ethics is good politics. To a great extent, men could attain a society that embodied the divine law; the Kingdom of God could never be fully attained on earth, but men could move a long way in that direction.

These brief considerations of Thomas Aquinas and Reinhold Niebuhr are useful for recognizing Norman Thomas place in Christian ethics. Clearly, Thomas differed significantly from both. Yet, he appears to have had much more in common with Aquinas than with Niebuhr. Both Aquinas and Thomas found unacceptable Niebuhr's contention that men are more enemies of God than his servants and that there can be no hope that men in history will fulfill the will of God. Both held that it was natural for men to follow the ethical prescriptions of Christianity. Notable differences existed between Aquinas and Thomas, but, over against Niebuhr, they did have similar starting points.

20 Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 130
This similarity in position regarding the relationship of the divine and the historical is sufficient reason for concluding that Thomas had more in common with the classical Christians tradition than he did with more orthodox Protestant contemporaries.

Norman Thomas' vision was, throughout, an essentially religious one. In comparison with other types of Christian social ethics, Thomas's Social Gospel should be understood as an example of the "Christ of culture" position. The validity of his approach can only be adequately judged by facing the basic issue of the relationship of the divine to the human and reaching some conclusion on that theological question. And when these theological judgments are made, one should not be surprised to find more sympathy for Thomas' vision among those who take Thomas Aquinas as a theological guide than among those who turn to Martin Luther or Reinhold Niebuhr.
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