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ABSTRACT

The Labour Church movement was a leading expression of British ethical socialism. Historians have approached the movement from the perspective of a dominant Marxist or labourist historiography according to which a quasi-religious, ethical socialism represents a primitive rebellion to be replaced by a mature, secular and class-based socialism. Historians have explained the rise of the Labour Church as part of a transfer of religious energy to the political sphere; and they have explained its demise by reference to the continuing process of secularisation. This essay challenges the dominant historiography by taking seriously the religious self-understanding of the Labour Church. First it explains the rise of the movement in terms of the immanentist theology with which many Victorians and Edwardians responded to the crisis of faith. Then it uses the doctrinal basis of the movement to explain its appeal, structure, and activities. Finally it suggests the decline of the movement reflects the weaknesses of its theology as a political theory.

THE LABOUR CHURCH MOVEMENT 1891-1902

I

Historians of British socialism have tended to discount the significance of religious belief. Yet the conference held in Bradford in 1893 to form the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.) was accompanied by a Labour Church service attended by some five thousand persons.[1] The conference took place in a disused chapel then being run as a Labour Institute by the Bradford Labour Church along with the local Labour Union and Fabian Society. The Labour Church movement which played such an important role in the history of British socialism was inspired by John Trevor, a Unitarian minister who resigned to found the first Labour Church in Manchester in 1891. At the new church's first service, on 4 October 1891, a string band opened the proceedings, after which Trevor led those present in prayer, the congregation listened to a reading of James Russell Lowell's poem "On the Capture of Fugitive Slaves," and Harold Rylett, a Unitarian minister, read Isiah 15. The choir rose to sing "England Arise," the popular socialist hymn by Edward Carpenter:

England arise! the long, long night is over,
Faint in the east behold the dawn appear;
Out of your evil dream of toil and sorrow -
Arise, O England, for the day is here;
From your fields and hills,
Hark! the answer swells -
Arise, O England, for the day is here.

As the singing stopped, Trevor rose to give a sermon on the religious aspect of the labor movement. He argued the failure of existing churches to support labor made it necessary for workers to form a new movement to embody the religious aspect of their quest for emancipation.[2] The new movement was the Labour Church, which rapidly gained adherents. When Rev. P. H. Wicksteed led a service in Manchester early the following year, his congregation was over six hundred.[3] Before long, Labour

Churches had sprung up in most large cities in Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, including, of course, Bradford.

Indeed, although British socialism owes debts to Marxism and Fabianism, many of its leading characteristics derive from a tradition of ethical socialism that emerged in the 1880s, flourished in the 1890s, and did much to inspire the formation of the I.L.P. and thus the Labour Party. Scholars who have examined the Labour Church have done so mainly to explore the nature of ethical socialism. What is more, they have reached remarkably similar conclusions. Eric Hobsbawm, Henry Pelling, and Stanley Pierson, for example, represented the Labour Church as a product of the impact of secularization and class politics on non-conformism.[4] Their view of the Labour Church had a symbiotic relationship with a dominant historiography that represented socialism as the product of developments leading inevitably to a modern, secular, class-based society. In this view, a religious society characterised by primitive rebellions naturally evolves into a secular one characterised by class conflict.[5]

I want to offer a new interpretation of the Labour Church, an interpretation which adds to a growing literature that deconstructs the dominant narratives in labor history, secularization, and modernization, and that does so through paying greater attention to the beliefs of those we study.[6] The task of reading the socialism of the 1890s against orthodox assumptions about modernization and secularization has been begun by Chris Waters and Stephen Yeo.[7] Waters shows how socialists remained wedded to a discourse of rational recreation that hampered their attempts to engage with the working class. As he says, however, this failing was almost universal among socialists; thus, a discourse of rational recreation cannot explain the particular origins, nature, and failings of the Labour Church. Yeo explores the structures of experience and belief embedded in the idea of a religion of socialism. But he confuses the use of certain words with a commitment to certain beliefs. Although E. B. Bax, William Morris, and even H. M. Hyndman used the phrase "religion of socialism", they were atheists, and we obscure more than we reveal if we put them, as he does, alongside

Carpenter and Trevor as exponents of a particular brand of socialism. Indeed, Yeo's attempt to yoke together such diverse socialists leads him ultimately to focus not on beliefs, but on the emotional role allegedly played by a socialism that did "a religious job" for its adherents.[8] We can sharpen the challenge to the dominant historiography of socialism, therefore, by looking at the theological basis of the Labour Church. The origins of the Labour Church lay not in the decline of religion and the rise of class, but in a shift in the content of religious belief. And the Labour Church failed not because it did not go far enough in renouncing religion and adopting class, but because of the weakness of its religious doctrines as a political theory.

II

The orthodox view understood the Labour Church not as a "religious manifestation but rather as a symptom of religious decline."[9] In this interpretation, the Labour Church arose as part of a process in which the religious enthusiasm of non-conformists was transferred to the political sphere of life. Some individual members of the Labour Church, and even whole branches, seem to fit this orthodox view reasonably well. Trevor himself, for example, was a Calvinist before he discovered Emerson and trained to become a Unitarian minister. Moreover, his decision to leave the Unitarians and found a Labour Church occurred because a member of his congregation said he had stopped attending chapel because he felt unable to breathe freely there.[10] The formation of the Bradford Labour Church reflects a similar process. In the run-up to the 1892 general election, wealthy non-conformist ministers sat on the platform at a meeting in support of a Liberal opponent of the socialist candidate, Ben Tillett. Fred Jowett stood up and warned them, "if you persist in opposing the Labour movement. . . we shall establish our own Labour Church," and that is what they did.[11]

Despite the support such cases seem to lend to the orthodox view, however, this interpretation is problematic. For a start, many members of the Labour Church retained non-conformist religious convictions. Philip Wicksteed, was, after Trevor,

probably the most important figure in the Labour Church, yet he remained a practising Unitarian minister long after joining the movement.[12] Similarly, the Bolton Labour Church was formed when Rev. B. Harker led his congregation in affiliating to the movement, but they did so only in "so far as their constitution as a congregational church would allow."[13] Moreover, the Labour Church attracted people who did not have a non-conformist background. Fred Brocklehurst, the second General Secretary of the Labour Church Union, was a Broad Church Anglican who had considered taking holy orders before turning to socialism.[14] Paul Campbell, who formed the London Church, was an Anglican who edited the Christian Socialist and played an active role in the settlement movement.[15] J. A. Fallows, a former minister in the Church of England, became Secretary to the Birmingham Church.[16] Walter Morse, who became secretary of the Union in 1896, had been an Anglican until he joined the Leeds Church.[17] And R. A. Beckett, who edited The Labour Prophet, the movement's magazine, was the son of an Anglican clergyman.[18] Indeed, we can find people who turned to the Labour Church from backgrounds that were not properly Christian: the Keighley Church was formed by Swedenborgians, and, of course, Keir Hardie was raised by free-thinking parents, although by 1890 he had turned to evangelicalism.[19] The example of Hardie points to another problem with the orthodox view of the Labour Church. Most of its members were not on the road to secularism. Their religious beliefs were powerful ones, and, as we will see, they held them, or ones like them, until death. A firm and lasting religious commitment characterized not only the Labour Church, but ethical socialism in general, as represented by, for example, Carpenter, John Bruce Glasier, Margaret McMillan, Caroline Martyn, Philip Snowden, and Tillett. Surely only a strong prior faith that a mature socialism must be secular could lead historians to reinterpret the religious self-understanding of these people as a transitional stage on the road to a secular outlook.

The problems we have identified with the orthodox explanation of the rise of the Labour Church point to the need to take seriously the religious self-understanding of the movement's participants and to explain the rise of these religious beliefs

without relying too heavily on peculiar features of non-conformism. The Victorian crisis of faith provides us with the basis of such an explanation. The crisis occurred because the theory of evolution, historical criticism of the Bible, and moral doubts led many Christians to question Biblical literalism. As historians increasingly emphasize, however, there were many different responses to the crisis of faith, of which secularism was by no means the most common. Many Victorians tried to reconcile faith with evolutionary theory and historical criticism by turning from the atonement theology so characteristic of the early Victorian period to an immanentist view of God.[20] They argued that God dwells in the world, revealing himself through an evolutionary process, rather than acting as a transcendent figure, intervening in our world spontaneously and miraculously as exemplified by the creation of species and the Bible. Thus, they argued, Darwinism merely captures the way God works his will gradually through natural means, and historical criticism merely shows the Bible to be a part of this continuing process, not an isolated revelation. Among Christians, immanentism led also to a renewed interest in Christ the man: these believers emphasized the importance of God's presence in the world as exemplified primarily by the incarnation but also by the Church Christ left to fulfil his purpose.[21] Immanentism flourished among non-conformists such as the Rev. R. Campbell, Anglicans like the Rev. J. R. Illingworth, and even occultists such as Madame Blavatsky.[22] Moreover, people who moved towards deism, romantic pantheism, agnosticism, and even atheism, often adopted belief-systems resembling an immanentist faith. Philosophical idealists such as T. H. Green and D. G. Ritchie, drew on Hegel, sometimes combined with Darwin, to suggest that human affairs embody the operation of a universal spirit conceived as a progressive force.[23] And numerous writers, including not only new liberals, such as J. A. Hobson, but even sex reformers, such as James Hinton, used evolutionary theories to postulate an inherently progressive movement in nature and society.[24]

Ethical socialism had its roots in this immanentist faith. Indeed, immanentism, idealism, social evolution, and sexology often inspired their Victorian

exponents to adopt a progressive politics.[25] The Ethical Societies, for instance, brought together proponents of all these theories around a commitment to bringing a vague progressive Christian ethos to bear on social relations.[26] To relate the Labour Church and ethical socialism to immanentist theology is therefore to locate them in well-known trends in late nineteenth-century thought. Immanentism promoted a socialist outlook in three main ways.[27] First, it undermined the evangelical distinction between the secular and the sacred. By arguing that the divine is present in this world, it rendered social life on earth a religious matter. D. B. Foster, for example, argued that the Labour Church attracted people who rejected "the 'other worldliness'" of the existing churches.[28] Second, immanentism suggested that everyone contained the divine in them. In this view, all humans belong to one universal brotherhood by virtue of the fact they all embody the one divine spirit. Carpenter, for example, had a mystical experience in which "mere diversities of temperament which ordinarily distinguish and divide people dropped away and became indifferent."[29] Indeed, most ethical socialists believed that the evolutionary unfolding of the divine would lead inevitably to socialism, where socialism was understood principally as universal brotherhood. They defined socialism as the realization of an ethic of fellowship rather than collective ownership of the means of production. Immanentism encouraged them to see society not as a coagulation of atomistic individuals, but as an organic whole of fellows. This view held that humans were related to one another not only by a shared human nature, but also by mutual dependence and the movement of history towards a common good. Because ethical socialists defined socialism in terms of an inner spirituality and sense of brotherhood, rather than economic relationships or institutional arrangements, they insisted on the importance of an inner change as a pre-requisite for socialism. To create socialism, they argued, one first must make socialists precisely because a sense of belonging to a universal brotherhood was the defining feature of socialism. Finally, immanentism promoted a renewed interest in the incarnation and Jesus the man. Ethical socialists often evoked images of Christ as the son of a carpenter: they emphasized that he came from the downtrodden, sided

with the downtrodden, and lived a simple life of fellowship with his disciples. Fred Henderson described the workers as "Gaunt Christs, whose thorns are not yet hid with bayes."[30] And Glasier likened capitalists who "cry communist" to those who did "crucify" Christ.[31]

The Labour Church thus belongs in a tradition of ethical socialism that arose out of the Victorian crisis of faith. Its members often experienced this crisis in their own lives. Foster, who joined the Leeds Church, grew up a Wesleyan and became a local preacher at the tender age of seventeen before suffering from severe doubts about the compatibility of his faith with modern science and above all about the morality of the atonement. Faced with his doubts, he followed "the revelation of life" offered him by Jesus until he learnt to "trust to the great creative forces."[32] Inspired by this thought he committed himself to the Wesleyan Missions, but before long he left them for the Labour Church. William Jupp grew up a Calvinist and became a Congregationalist minister until doubt led him to Emerson and Wordsworth, whose writings inspired him to establish a Brotherhood Church in Croydon.[33] Percy Redfern, a secularist until he turned to the Labour Church, the co-operative movement, and Tolstoyism, spoke for many when he complained that secularism offered only a "negative" liberation when people needed a "truth <u>now</u>, a whole truth, a truth they can live by."[34] For the members of the Labour Church, this truth was that God existed as a presence in the spontaneous life of the world, rather than as a transcendent being who conveyed his law in a dogmatic revelation. For many of them, as for other immanentists, this truth was exemplified by the life of Jesus. As Foster argued, "the realisation of the Christ ideal is the greatest force for Socialism in the world."[35]

The Labour Church stood for a belief in a divine spirit which was present within humanity and was evolving to take us, in Trevor's words, to "the great source of all things."[36] What distinguished the Labour Church from other expressions of Victorian immanentism was a conviction that the means of realizing God's kingdom was the labor movement. Foster argued that because trade unions made "specific

trade interests subservient to the general interest of all the workers," they necessarily were promoting socialism -- the Kingdom of God, understood as "co-operation of the whole people in owning and controlling the means of life."[37] Wicksteed dealt with the problem that the labor movement did not always seem to embody this "democratic spirit":

> It would no doubt be easy to show that a great deal of what announces itself as belonging to the Labour Movement . . . is in fact opposed to this [democratic] principle . . . But, nonetheless, whenever the Labour Movement looks into its own principles, and formulates its goal, it is the abolition, not the maintenance, of privilege which inspires it; and we may fearlessly assert that, so far as the Labour Movement means anything, it means the organisation of society in the interest of the unprivileged producers.[38]

Some Labour Church activists contrasted a commitment to the Labour Movement with one to Christ: Beckett complained that Christ made no "contribution to sociology" merely advocating indiscriminate charity, while Trevor wanted to temper a “Christian tenderness of suffering" with a "Pagan joy in life."[39] Others, however, including John Kenworthy, argued that the brotherhood of man was the central message of Christ as well as of the Labour Church.[40]

A somewhat less unique feature of the Labour Church was its anti-theological character. Within the Church of England, the Lux Mundi theologians and others defended immanentism with arguments about the relationship of faith to reason and about the character of the incarnation and Bible.[41] Labour Church writers, in contrast, often saw theology as an attempt to suppress life with doctrine. Sam Hobson even argued that Christ "was essentially a practical teacher" who constantly made clear his "detestation of mere theology."[42] In this analysis, the labor movement incorporated the divine spirit because it embodied life, whereas the older churches expressed a sterile theological tradition, and, as Trevor wrote, when "Life appears on the scene, Tradition is compelled to weakly follow."[43] A rejection of dogma, together with a belief that the whole labor movement embodied the divine, could leave members of

the Labour Church confused by its apparent lack of clear commitments. Mr Gutteridge, of the Nottingham Church, for example, said he was "puzzled by the multiplicity of the ideas of their speakers," for "one Sunday, they would have an orthodox speaker, and . . . the next an aggressive secularist."[44] Most members, however, recognized, as did Gutteridge here, that the Labour Church had its orthodoxy -- an immanentist faith sustaining an ideal of universal brotherhood as embodied in the labor movement.

The Labour Church defined the good society in terms of the fellowship implied by the ubiquitous presence of the divine. Redfern, for example, contrasted "fraternity with the universe, under one maker, to conquest over it through the mind used as a weapon."[45] A socialist society would recognize the importance of each individual, but it would do so in the context of an understanding of the unity of all individuals within a spiritual process of evolution leading towards a common good. Foster, for example, wrote, "sociality, the spirit which demands the socialisation of the necessaries of human life, is but individuality fuller grown."[46] Members of the Labour Church typically defined the socialist ideal in terms of a spiritual fellowship, not economic reforms. Moreover, the economic reforms for which they did call typically derived from an ethic of fellowship, not an economic analysis of capitalism. Foster described how after he became a socialist, he saw "the way to that Kingdom of God on earth for which I have prayed and worked so long"; he saw "why Love was the fulfilling of the Law," and this altered his view of "my relation to my fellows" so that "the men whom I employed became my comrades in life, whose needs constituted their right to wages rather than their ability to make profit for me."[47] The emphasis on a new life of the spirit explains why Labour Churches so often provided platforms for speakers advocating other new humanitarian causes, including anti-vivisection, ethical culture, theosophy, Tolstoyism, and vegetarianism. Here too, however, we can find themes that were more specific to the Labour Churches. Most obviously, the Labour Church insisted that poverty was a result of "the industrial environment of the people" and so had to be eradicated by socialist means.[48]

Finally, the Labour Church adopted the strategy, so common among ethical socialists, of making socialists. Once people felt the divine in themselves, the Labour Church's adherents argued, they would recognize the relationship of brotherhood that linked them to others and so would create a new fellowship. As the first missionaries spread the religion of socialism, so others would convert to the cause and transform their personal lives, eventually creating God's kingdom on earth. As Rachel McMillan proclaimed, "they [people] are 'bound to do it' if they think at all."[49] Here too the Labour Church gave a special role to the labor movement as the agent of change. Labour Church exponents argued that labor needed an independent party and independent church to distance itself from Conservatives and Liberals and also the Church of England and non-conformity. Because the labor movement expressed the divine life, it must avoid the traditions embodied in the elder parties and churches. "The Labour Church," Trevor explained, "is the Labour Movement in its religious aspect."[50]

III

Because the Labour Church arose as a product of the immanentism that flourished in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, the religious doctrines informing the Labour Church -- not a process of secularisation -- best explain its nature and practices. Its "Statement of Principles" certainly expressed a belief in an immanent God and an ethic of fellowship apparent in the labor movement. As the Labour Prophet proclaimed in 1892:

> The Labour Church is based upon the following Principles:
>
> 1. That the Labour Movement is a religious movement.
> 2. That the Religion of the Labour Movement is not a Class Religion, but unites members of all classes in working for the Abolition of Commercial Slavery.
> 3. That the Religion of the Labour Movement is not Sectarian or Dogmatic, but Free Religion, leaving each man free to develop his own relations with the Power that brought him into being.

4. That the emancipation of Labour can be realised so far as men learn both the Economic and Moral Laws of God, and heartily endeavour to obey them.
5. That the development of Personal Character and the improvement of Social Conditions are both essential to man's emancipation from moral and social bondage.[51]

Yet although the Labour Church was based on a particular set of religious and ethical doctrines, the importance of these doctrines can be obscured by the fact that they inspired an anti-doctrinal perspective. A stress on the immanence of God led members of the Labour Church to dismiss doctrine as insignificant, even damaging. They showed no real interest in theological disputes about whether God was a person or principal, whether Christ was the son of God, and whether Christ founded a visible church based on the apostolic succession. Such disputes, they argued, mattered little compared to the great truth that God's presence on earth bound men and women together in a universal brotherhood. But despite these anti-theological tendencies, the Labour Church adhered to a core doctrine, a belief in what Tom Mann called "the DEITY or NATURE."[52] In this view, God was an "intense reality in which all life was united into one whole-souled harmony."[53] No doubt this belief left little room for other religious doctrines, but it did inspire an intense faith in a Brotherhood of Man and so an ethical approach to politics.

The anti-theological doctrines of the Labour Church proved remarkably appealing. Over a thousand Labour Church Hymn Books were sold in one day at the second annual meeting of the movement in Birmingham in 1894.[54] Over a hundred Labour Churches were formed, although many lasted only briefly so that the number of active branches peaked at just over fifty around 1895.[55] The most important church remained that in Manchester, where in 1893 and 1894 three services were held each Sunday, all usually attracting full houses.[56] Most churches had congregations of three to five hundred persons. Bradford had three hundred members, attracted more to its services, and often sold five thousand copies of its newspaper.[57] Dundee had an average congregation of four hundred, although it had to turn people away when

Hardie spoke at the inaugural meeting.[58] Halifax generally attracted some five hundred participants.[59] Oldham's average attendance was three hundred, of whom one hundred were regulars.[60] And Plymouth always filled a hall with a capacity of about two hundred and fifty.[61] When a hundred and twenty persons attended a service of the Birmingham Church in 1893, its members were disappointed, saying the turn-out was not "very good."[62] There were, however, many smaller Labour Churches: Wolverhampton generally had an attendance of about a hundred at its monthly meetings, whilst Barnsley rarely attracted more than forty.[63] Although famous speakers boosted attendances, many churches reported "a difficulty in getting speakers, especially on the moral and religious side of the work."[64]

The Labour Church attracted persons from both sexes of a variety of ages and social classes, although, as one would expect in a socialist organization of the time, young lower middle-class and upper working-class males predominated. The most notable attribute of the members was a shared religious experience. This experience is described in the spiritual autobiographies that flourished in the late Victorian and Edwardian era among members of the Labour Church and others within and without the socialist movement.[65] Judging by the evidence we have from members of the Labour Church who wrote about their religious life, they were raised in traditional structures of faith, then experienced profound doubts, before coming to believe again through an encounter with romantics such as Emerson or Wordsworth, a personal sense of oneness with their fellows, or a new religious movement such as theosophy or spiritualism. Through all sorts of encounters, they came to hold an immanentist faith. Although the Labour Church attracted adherents who were raised as Catholics, or in the Church of England, or even as secularists, the majority did have non-conformist backgrounds. We can explain the predominance of non-conformists, however, by reference to the religious experiences and doctrines underlying the movement. For a start, secularists clearly would not experience evolutionary theory, historical criticism and the like as dilemmas requiring them to change their religious beliefs. Similarly, although Anglicans experienced the crisis of faith, and although

they often responded to it by adopting immanentism, the Church of England provided more outlets than did non-conformity for those who rejected the atonement theology that had dominated the early Victorian era. Indeed, there arose in the Church of England organizations such as the Guild of St. Matthew and the Christian Social Union which were based on the same mix of immanentism and social concern found in the Labour Church.[66] Moreover, non-conformists came from a tradition in which independent churches already had a well established place. The predominance of non-conformists in the Labour Church, indeed, goes a long way towards explaining its geographical distribution. The Labour Church thrived in the industrial centers of non-conformity. In the first four months of 1894, four new churches sprang up in South Lancashire alone.[67] Somewhat over half of the fifty or so branches which lasted for more than a year were formed in Lancashire or the West Riding of Yorkshire. In addition, there were several branches in South Wales and Scotland, a small group around Birmingham, a slightly larger group in the Potteries, and others dotted all around the country.

The services of the Labour Churches clearly expressed the immanentism on which the movement was founded. The content of services was meant to reflect local traditions and requirements, but the ideal service was said to consist of: "(1) Hymn (2) Reading (3) Prayer (4) Solo or Music by the Choir (5) Notices and Collection (6) Hymn (7) Address (8) Hymn (9) Benediction."[68] In practice, however, few Labour Churches bothered with more than hymns, readings, addresses, and short prayers. The Labour Church Hymn Book contained few traditional hymns, being composed mainly of socialist songs by writers such as Carpenter and Morris and poems by romantics such as Emerson and Charles Kingsley.[69] Readings in the Labour Churches also came from these writers, with Trevor complaining, "the Bible is so frightfully and falsely conventionalised . . . it is difficult to make a Bible reading a real and helpful thing to a Labour Church audience."[70] Although the labour churches often relied on local activists to give the addresses, the most popular speakers were those who proved most successful for the I.L.P., including Robert Blatchford, McMillan, and Tillett. Hobson,

a Quaker born in Ireland who joined the Cardiff Church and sat on the Council of the Labour Church Union, recalled Snowdon being the most popular speaker; Hardie attracted larger crowds but spoke less often, while Conway and Enid Stacey had more select audiences.[71] The hymns, readings, and addresses of the Labour Churches all relied heavily, therefore, on ethical socialists and the romantics who inspired them. They relied on those who held immanentist or pantheistic beliefs, persons who celebrated the divine nature of the world and the joyful fellowship it implied. The same was true of the prayers and benedictions used in Labour Churches. Benedictions were brief and simple, composed of a phrase such as "May the strength and joy of God's presence be with all who love their brethren in sincerity, Amen"[72]

The doctrines underlying the Labour Church implied that the way to build socialism was to make socialists. Disseminating awareness of the reality of universal brotherhood, adherents argued, would encourage people to transform their personal lives in accord with the fellowship ideal, and this was how socialism would arise. The main activities of the Labour Churches, apart from religious services, were, therefore, educational and philanthropic ones.[73] With respect to education, the churches tried both to improve their own understanding of the theoretical principles underlying socialism, and also to bring others, particularly workers, to an inner conversion to socialism. The churches often founded their own Sunday School or took over one established by a Clarion Club, and many also organized adult education classes in religion, economics, and ethics.[74] The London Church, under the guidance of Campbell and McMillan, was especially active in outreach education.[75] After McMillan moved to Yorkshire, she lectured at the Leeds Church, in 1896 on the French Revolution, and in 1897 on Modern Economists -- Smith, Ricardo, Jevons, Mill, Marx, and, significantly, Ruskin.[76] The churches also drew heavily on the resources provided by the Fabian Society to educate themselves. The movement's newspapers regularly urged members to join Fabian Correspondence Classes, with Trevor saying "there is the greatest need for education in our movement, and the

Fabian Society is taking the work in hand."[77] The Birmingham Church joined with the local Fabians to establish a Socialist Lecture Committee.[78]

The philanthropic activities of the churches varied considerably. The Bradford Church collected £12,10s for the local Cotton Operatives.[79] The Hanley Church led a campaign against local lead-poisoning.[80] Foster worked tirelessly to publicize and improve the condition of the slums in Leeds, a task he continued after being elected a local councillor.[81] The Manchester Church organized a Shelter for the Homeless and a Cinderella Club for underprivileged children in the Deansgate area of the city.[82] Many of the movement's Sunday Schools were tied to a Cinderella Club, which raised money to provide treats for children.[83] The Manchester Club organised an annual picnic in the city park, a Christmas feast in the schoolroom, and various outings to the countryside.[84] The Birmingham Club, which outlived the Birmingham Church, ran a holiday cottage for crippled children.[85]

Although the educational and philanthropic activities of the churches were intended to provide a cultural basis for socialism, the churches themselves eschewed political action, holding that if they could make socialists, politics would look after itself.[86] The Annual Meeting of 1899 passed a resolution "deprecating the taking of political action by Labour Churches as such, although heartily approving of such action by individual members."[87] When John Sneyd of the Hanley Church proposed this resolution, he argued that "where there was no political party they [the Labour Church] ought to make their position known, but where a political party existed they could leave it to them."[88] The Labour Church had particularly close ties with the I.L.P., a fact explicable by their shared location in the broad movement of ethical socialism. Just as earlier we noticed the role the Labour Church played in the formation of the I.L.P., so now we should note the extent to which the Labour Church drew strength from the I.L.P. In 1894 the Council of the I.L.P. recommended all its branches to form Labour Churches to promote the religious side of the movement. Indeed, the available evidence suggests that most Labour Churches had close ties with the local I.L.P. There was a considerable overlap of personnel. Brocklehurst was on

the National Administrative Council of the I.L.P. as well as General Secretary of the Labour Church Union; Harker, who led the formation of the Bolton Church, was elected President of the local I.L.P.; and Hobson, of the Cardiff Church, was elected Chairman of the I.L.P. in Wales.[89] Often, as in Oldham, the church even met in the clubroom of the local I.L.P.[90] In general, the Labour Church and the I.L.P. attracted similar memberships, relied on the same speakers, and embodied similar beliefs. The Labour Prophet relied quite heavily on articles by leading lights in the I.L.P.: Conway, Hardie, McMillan, Mann, and Tillett all wrote pieces in the first year of publication. Moreover, the services of the churches closely resembled branch meetings of the I.L.P. Both gatherings usually consisted of a hymn or song, a reading from a religious or political book, and an address by a prominent speaker. The only real difference was that church services included a short prayer. It even seems probable that some Labour Churches were formed largely to get around a law forbidding political meetings on Sundays. Certainly the Dundee Labour Church was formed explicitly not only to keep "the religious element in the cause robust" but also to allow "lecturers to obtain a hearing on Sundays."[91] If a Labour Church ran into difficulties with the local I.L.P., the result was normally disaster for the Church. The Dundee Church, for instance, seems to have fallen apart by January 1896, having reported opposition from the local I.L.P. in April 1895.[92]

The I.L.P. was, however, not the only political organization with which the Labour Churches associated themselves. Indeed, while Trevor welcomed the I.L.P. "unhesitatingly," he published in the movement's newspaper not only an article in favor of the I.L.P. by Mann, but also one by Rylett arguing against independent political action and for co-operation with the Liberal Party.[93] To some extent, of course, the allegiances of the churches reflected those of the areas in which they were located. Lancashire, together with London, provided the main source of support for the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.), and the Bolton Church had close ties with the local S.D.F.[94] After the I.L.P., however, the political organization with which the Labour Churches most often aligned themselves was the Fabian Society. In

Liverpool, Fabians organized church meetings; in Cardiff, the Church was formed by a group of young men who earlier had formed a local Fabian Society; and, in Leek, the Church was opened by an address by Fred Whelan describing what the Fabian Society could do to aid Labour Churches.[95] In general, however, we should be careful not to distinguish too sharply between the I.L.P. and other socialist organizations, for at least at the local level their membership often overlapped. The Fabian Society, in particular, provided a congenial home for many of the ethical socialists who joined the I.L.P. As one activist later recalled, "in the northern regions then dominant in Labour politics, the British socialism at this time (before 1906) was the Fabianism of the idealists of the Independent Labour Party."[96]

The close links between the Labour Church and other socialist organizations meant that its fortunes fluctuated alongside theirs. Here the enthusiastic optimism of 1893 to 1895, when many believed the good news of socialism would spread rapidly through the working class to bring the new life into being, gave way to the more realistic determination of the period from 1895 to 1900.[97] For a start, changes in British society, including attacks on trade unions, developments in the scale and organization of industry, and the growth of commercialized leisure pursuits, all widened the gulf between the aspirations of the socialists and the daily concerns and activities of the working class. The Labour Church, like other socialist organizations, had greater difficulty attracting and retaining members. The number of Labour Churches rose each year from 1891 to 1895, but then fell from about fifty in 1895 to forty in 1897, thirty in 1898, and twenty in 1902.[98] In addition, the 1895 election suggested socialists had to prepare to meet the exacting demands of sustained political activity. Many ethical socialists shifted their focus from making socialists to problems of political agency, including the structure and finance of a political party and even the opportunities and costs of collaborating with other parties. The failure of the Labour Church to embody this shift of focus meant that other socialists began taking a more jaded view of its role. In Halifax, for example, the I.L.P. started to compete, not co-operate, with the Church: arguing that the Church was not practical

enough, it organized political meetings to coincide with services in a move that led in 1901 to the dissolution of the Church.[99]

Despite occasional conflicts between churches and other local socialist groups, the main political role of the Labour Churches always remained to provide a cultural basis for activity undertaken elsewhere. As Edwin Halford, of the Bradford Church, explained, "the Churches were formed for education, and for the stimulation of action on the part of Socialists," so "political action" lay "outside their sphere of work."[100] The cultural activities of the churches, moreover, often focused more on socialism as a way of life than on any overtly religious theme. Few Labour Churches even bothered with the rites of passage traditionally performed by the other churches. Although the Leeds Church performed christenings, devised a ceremony "equivalent to the orthodox baptism," and acquired a marriage license, such activities were rare.[101] Apart from anything else, many Labour Churches feared that the person who performed the rites of passage would acquire a priestly status of which they strongly disapproved. The immanentist belief that God was present equally in all inspired a strongly democratic and anti-clerical outlook.

A democratic ethos certainly underlay the organizational structure of the Labour Church. The branches embodied a concept of brotherhood or fellowship as opposed to priesthood. Because Labour Churches held that everyone had a place in the divine order, they believed that everyone had a part to play in organizing, managing, and leading the movement. The typical labour church had no priest, pulpit, or Bible. It was just a congregation of believers held together by a chairman with no special status. Some churches, such as Hanley, had a constitution, but many did not.[102] There were no rituals or organized forms of worship, with each church adopting the activities best suited to its particular nature and needs. Many churches, including Dundee, allowed speakers to choose whatever form of service they wished.[103] To ensure that the churches represented a spontaneous eruption of life, not the dead weight of theology, central organization of the movement was kept to a minimum. The local churches did not even have to subscribe to the five principles on

which the national movement was based: the Birmingham Church, for example, replaced them with a demand making faith in the divine optional -- members had to accept "the moral and economic laws that may be adduced from the Fatherhood of God or the Brotherhood of Man."[104] The first issue of the monthly Labour Prophet appeared in January 1892 and thereafter it provided the main centralising force within the movement. For although a full-time general secretary was appointed briefly by the Labour Churches, the post did not last long as the local churches could not afford to pay a suitable salary. In 1893, about twenty branches came together to form a Labour Church Union, which held annual meetings, but the Union had little power and never attracted many more than the initial twenty affiliates.[105]

IV

The orthodox account of the Labour Church suggests that it collapsed because the process of secularization continued to take members away from the sort of quasi-religion it embodied. More particularly, previous historians of the movement have argued that its decline reflects a process of secularization characterised by the rise of cycling clubs and other "sport and entertainment at the expense of religion and serious political discussion."[106] But this argument is ignores the fact that Labour Churches often sponsored new leisure pursuits. The first Clarion Cycling Club, for example, arose from a meeting held in the Birmingham Labour Church in 1894, and many other Labour Churches formed cycling clubs. The Birmingham Labour Church discussed the reasons for falling attendances in some detail, but at no point do they seem to have related the problem to the rise of the local cycling club.[107] Indeed, not one published discussion by any Labour Church seems to mention the cycling clubs as a factor in the movement's decline.[108]

No doubt some members of the Labour Church rejected the immanentism inspiring the movement. Nonetheless, the religious beliefs that informed the Labour Church provided a fairly stable solution to the crisis of faith, and most members of the Labour Church appear to have adhered to them long after the movement collapsed.

Trevor, for example, upheld an immanentist faith within the South Place Ethical Society right up until his death.[109] Wicksteed, despite having struggled to find a place in his theology for the Boer War and World War One, was still contributing to the Unitarian newspaper, The Inquirer, as late as 1923.[110] As his biographer concludes, "the passion for spiritual realities which had informed all his work still burnt within him when the end was at hand."[111] Redfern became a Tolstoyan mystic who refused all institutional affiliation for a commitment to the divine as equally present in all things.[112] Hobson became a guild socialist and also a member of a New Europe Group which combined occultism, psychology, and social reformism: the Group caught his faith in "a profound humanity that moves to its appointed end [the reign of love] uninfluenced by the schools."[113] Foster remained convinced that "the ever-growing public life around me was a far truer interpretation of the spirit of Jesus than the narrow self-saving ideas common in the churches."[114] Even those who became disillusioned with the Labour Church in the 1890s often retained an immanentist faith expressed in some form of social work. Hugh Gore of the Bristol Church, for example, worked in a Boy's Club so as to infuse into the young a sense of the divine spirit within and the consequent fact of human brotherhood.[115] The later histories of surviving branches of the Labour Church show a similar pattern. Several joined the Ethical Culture Movement, the Aberdeen Church was absorbed by the local Unitarians, the Keighley Church returned to its Swedenborgian origins, Jupp's Croydon Church remained a part of the Brotherhood Church movement, and the Hyde Church continued as a Labour Church into World War Two. Indeed, as some of these examples suggest, members of the Labour Church were more likely to renounce an active role in the socialist movement than to give up an immanentist or pantheistic faith. To some extent the same might be said perhaps of other ethical socialists. After all, Carpenter's socialism became less and less prominent as he withdrew into his own mystical practices, and Percival Chubb went to America where he became active in the Ethical Culture, but not socialist, movement.[116] Once again, therefore, the

orthodox account of the Labour Church must appear inadequate unless supported by a modernization theory according to which secularization is inevitable.

The problems we have identified in the orthodox explanation of the collapse of the Labour Church point to the need for an explanation that brings together the way some members withdrew from politics in the name of their faith and the way others came to regard the Labour Church as of little political use. Here the collapse of the Labour Church reflects the limitations of its immanentism when used as a political doctrine. In very general terms, the problem is that immanentists usually have to appeal to a wider audience if they are to acquire the support necessary for effective political action, but to make such an appeal, they have to play down their religious faith. If they remain true to their faith, there remains little effective political activity they can undertake, but if they try to formulate an effective political stance, they often undermine their religious identity. Thus, any organization akin to the Labour Church is likely to face a conflict between religious purity and political effectiveness, and all too often this conflict leads to sterility and the decline of the organization. Certainly the competing claims of religious purity and political effectiveness pulled apart the Labour Church. They did so, of course, in the context of the shift among socialists from the enthusiastic optimism of the early 1890s to a greater recognition of the need for sustained political action. The 1895 election and attacks on trade unions served, as we have seen, both to slow down the expansion of socialism and to make socialists more aware of questions of political agency. It is important to emphasize, however, that these changes were far from sufficient causes of the collapse of the Labour Church. Socialist groups such as the I.L.P. continued to grew, albeit at a reduced rate, in the less favorable climate, and, moreover, they did so in part by paying greater attention to issues of organization and finance.[117] Why, we should ask, was the Labour Church unable to do likewise? The answer lies in the limitations of its immanentism as a political doctrine.

The theology of the Labour Church implied the divine was working through the labor movement but that any attempt to theorize the process was likely to create a

tradition that would inhibit the natural expression of life. Yet if God was using the labor movement in this manner, the Labour Church could not question the activities of the movement: if the labour movement expressed divine life in a way that theological reflection could only hinder, the Church had no business theorizing the movement. Thus, the Labour Church could aim only "to set free the tremendous power of religious enthusiasm and joy which is now pent-up in the great labour movement."[118] Its doctrines precluded its taking a properly critical stance towards its secular counterparts. It had no role save to proclaim the labor movement as a religious one embodying the divine life in its immediate veracity. Certainly Trevor often explained that the Labour Church did not exist to bring a religious dimension to the labor movement, but only to witness the religious nature of that movement. Thus, the first principle of the Labour Church declared initially, "the Labour Movement is a religious movement," and later "the Labour Church exists to give expression to the religion of the Labour Movement." The difficulty was if the Labour Church existed only to glorify the labor movement, there was little point its having a separate identity, and if it nonetheless had a separate identity, this identity could bring it into conflict with the labor movement.

We should not be surprised, therefore, to discover the Labour Church torn between absorption within the political movement, which would undermine its own religious identity, and repudiation of the political movement, which would contradict its own theology. The tension between these two positions comes across in Trevor's struggle to defend the religious content of the movement. Whereas he and his allies, including Foster and Redfern, wanted the Labour Church to retain a quite distinctive religious identity, other key figures, notably Brocklehurst, wanted rather to reduce its mission to the "Labour programme" conceived as the "socialisation of wealth through the election of independent Labour candidates to all representative bodies."[119] Indeed, Brocklehurst happily would have subordinated the religious identity of the movement to a political commitment. He said, "neither religious faith nor want of religious faith should debar any man from joining our ranks."[120] These theoretical differences led to

struggles over the form of services and the wording of official pronouncements. In 1895, for example, Trevor introduced a formal benediction, including a reference to God, at the end of services in Manchester, and recommended others to do likewise.[121] But few Labour Churches followed his lead, and some members disliked his use of the word God. A similar dispute arose over whether or not to include prayers in services. Trevor argued prayer "should not be lightly abandoned," since its absence was "a weakness in a religious service."[122] But a number of Labour Churches did without prayer, and some members disliked the idea of adopting such a traditional religious practice.[123]

The most tenaciously fought dispute concerned whether or not to use the word God in the movement's pronouncements. Trevor had a warm attachment to the word God, believing it conveyed the idea of a "Supreme Power we all must recognise" better than could any alternative.[124] Others, such as Brocklehurst, however, thought the word God was irrelevant. The first struggle here was over the motto of The Labour Prophet. Initially the front page carried the phrase "God is our King," but after four issues this was replaced by "Let Labour be the basis of civil society," a phrase taken from Mazzini. In 1894 Brocklehurst and his allies carried the fight to the movement's statement of principles. They wanted to adopt one that did not refer to the divine: "The Labour Church movement is a union of all those who, by organised or individual effort, are emphasising or developing the moral and ethical aspect of the Labour movement." The Labour Church Union voted to retain the word God only by the narrowest of majorities, eleven votes to nine.[125] Despite Trevor's apparent victory, moreover, an official journal of the movement still reported "Labour Church folk do not bother much about God," while Foster complained he saw little sign of "God consciousness" in the movement.[126] The problem was the more the Labour Church turned its back on religious forms, the more it denied itself a distinctive identity.

The problem of retaining a religious identity for the Labour Church was exacerbated by the fact that the more it succeeded in doing so the more it denied itself a political role. Indeed, some of those who wanted to retain a religious dimension to

the movement came to believe socialists had to avoid all political activity if they were to retain their spiritual integrity. "At last," Redfern recalled, "I began to think that it was in the nature of a struggle for political power to produce just that 'bankruptcy' of the socialist ideal."[127] The difficulty the Labour Church had in finding a political role stemmed largely from the way its doctrinal foundations encouraged a neglect of the question of agency. Immanentist theology suggested that the social transformation had to come from within, but that once people learned to listen to the divine within, the social transformation would follow automatically. Conway, for example, speaking to the Leek Church, defined socialism as "the form of society which must inevitably come into being when men believe, that is to say live by, the truth of the unity of life," while Trevor described the means to social reform as "to make life from within, to keep on making it."[128] In this view a social revolution was assured provided one made socialists. There was, therefore, no real need to ask how to bring about the social revolution other than by transforming inner lives. Such convictions led some members of the Labour Church to dismiss the need for strategic compromise to accommodate to the political world. It was from this perspective that Trevor denounced the I.L.P.:

> To a man who has any sense of the vast range of life, and of the intricate interaction between the laws of human progress, the I.L.P. must of necessity appear to be attempting the salvation of the world in appallingly cheap fashion. Making converts at the low price of a penny a head, winning elections by listening to tickling speeches, . . . jealous and suspicious of any extension of their own principles where they touch man's deeper needs and higher aspirations - all this I have been watching with perplexity and sorrow during the past twelve months.[129]

Since the theological foundations of the Labour Church encouraged members to see an inner transformation of themselves and others as sufficient to bring about the ideal, it is not surprising that they tended at least at times to be critical of organizations, such as the I.L.P., which engaged in the more mundane activities

necessary to obtain political power. And not surprisingly they tended also to look with abhorrence on the ways in which a pursuit of political power led these organizations to deviate from their high moral ideals. The Labour Church, in other words, often favored religious purity over political effectiveness in a way that left it unable to take political action, since to have done so would have been to depart from its religious principles. Members of the Labour Church put more emphasis on the labor movement, joining it, and being a good socialist, than they did on social reform, obtaining political power, and using it to make a better world. The only real role the Labour Church left itself was, therefore, that of preaching. After a while, however, many of its members began to see the limitations of this restricted role. As Gore of the Bristol Church explained, "what exercises the minds of some of us . . is a kind of consciousness that we have not considered the road at all"; "we have pictured the ultimate condition of Society, we have urged the wisdom, even the necessity, of its accomplishment, but we have failed so far to explain the rule of the road thither."[130]

Actually Gore was being rather kind to the Labour Church, since it had done precious little to fill out its picture of the ultimate condition of society. Immanentism encouraged a neglect of questions of policy as well as of agency, suggesting that institutions or policies were likely to become fossilised traditions, and, as such, to hinder the work of the divine. Hobson, for example, wanted "a complete absence of dogma" so life might flourish, that is, "a new concept of life wide enough to encompass existing creeds."[131] The theology of the Labour Church gave it the difficult task of sustaining fellowship while striving to avoid commitments to any tradition or policy. Of course the Labour Church did embody an unacknowledged tradition, including a view of politics, but to sustain real unity, commitment, and purpose, an organization generally needs to be more self-conscious about the policies for which it stands. Lacking such self-conscious identity, the Labour Church became little more than a public space in which socialists could gather to hear inspirational speakers from the national political movement. Clearly, however, these inspirational speakers -- Blatchford, Carpenter, Hardie, McMillan, Mann, Snowden, and Tillett --

could not provide the Labour Church with the daily organization needed to sustain it; after all, their primary commitment had to be to the national political movement. Certainly when Hardie addressed the Second Annual Meeting of the Labour Church Union, his speech was "largely devoted to I.L.P. politics."[132] Significantly, few of these inspirational speakers took the Labour Church seriously enough to mention it in their autobiographies.[133]

One member of the Labour Church spoke for many when he complained, "I find Labour Churches generally weak, unbusiness-like, and quarrelsome."[134] The conflict between religious purity and political effectiveness led not only to quarrels but also to a sense of purposelessness. A Clarion investigation into the causes of the decline of the movement highlighted the fact that so many people found "practically no difference between a Labour Church meeting and an I.L.P. meeting."[135] The Labour Prophet continued until 1898, when it was replaced by the smaller, quarterly Labour Church Record, which itself survived until 1902. By the end of the century, however, the survival of Labour Church publications indicated less the vitality of the movement as a whole than the continuing commitment of Trevor with Wicksteed's financial backing. Yet even Trevor's energies had begun to flag after the death of his wife and younger son in 1894. In 1900, after the failure of his proposals for a system of discipleship, he withdrew from the movement to farm chickens and study the sex question: his chief concern became "the redemption of love," to which end he later tried to set up a community based on free love, to be called Oasis.[136] When Allan Clarke, of the Bolton Church, took over Trevor's editorial duties, he immediately began a campaign to highlight the "spiritual" side of the movement, even proposing changing its name to "Goodwill Church" on the grounds that "'labour' shuts out so many people."[137] Foster too hoped to revive the movement by emphasizing its religious dimension. After he became President of the Labour Church Union, he visited numerous local churches to see if they contained any "God consciousness," but concluded sadly that "the purely material interpretation of life so far dominated the Labour Churches as to unfit them for any great spiritual leadership."[138] Although

some local churches still thrived -- the Bradford Church turned hundreds away from services as late as 1905 -- and although a few new ones were formed after the relative success of the Labour Party in the 1906 general election, the movement had ceased to be an effective force as early as 1902.[139]

V

The Labour Church was neither a staging-post on the way to a mature secular socialism, nor an organization fulfilling the emotional role of religious faith without being tied to any doctrinal content. Rather, it was an expression of an immanentist faith. Indeed, the immanentist theology of the Labour Church was what precluded it taking on an effective political role. Perhaps critics might object that the content of an immanentist faith shows it to be more or less secular. But even if one defined an immanentist faith as secular, one could not thereby rescue the orthodox account of the Labour Church. The orthodox account represents the Labour Church as a product of secularization conceived as a process in which changing social conditions eroded religious faith. I have portrayed the Labour Church, in contrast, as a product of the way intellectual dilemmas such as Darwinism prompted a change in the content of religious faith. Consequently, even if one defines immanentism as a type of secularism, one still has to explore the Labour Church primarily by reference to these intellectual dilemmas, not changing social conditions.

Indeed, the history of the Labour Church suggests that secularization is a more complex process than has been recognised to date. Changing religious patterns at the turn of the century did not simply reflect the appearance of new social conditions which no longer provided a basis for faith. Rather, intellectual dilemmas undermined the atonement theology of the early Victorian age, and so led believers to modify the content of their faith and sometimes to reject all forms of religious belief. Of course social conditions did change considerably, but the changes did not simply drive members away from the churches, particularly as the churches, often inspired by immanentist theologies, were more than capable of moving with the changes. As one

historian has put it in criticising the orthodox view of secularization, "far from being inherently estranged from the new social forces, churches and religious organizations were often promoters and carriers of the new ideas and institutions."[140] The turn of the century saw a shift from formal doctrines to beliefs such as the romantic pantheism and immanentism found in the Labour Church. The decline of formal doctrine meant that religious practices and forms increasingly became matters of personal taste, often linked to public movements. For a start, the decline of formal doctrine meant the choice of religious form often reflected an aesthetic judgement at least as much as a theological commitment. Thus, the example of the Labour Church mirrors a more general decline in credal orthodoxy -- hymns and sermons were valued as much for being aesthetically pleasing as for being theologically precise, and expressions of religious belief became increasingly bland. A similar focus on pleasure rather than theology underlay the pioneering use by churches of new leisure pursuits, including not only cycling but also football, boxing, and cinema. In addition, the decline of formal doctrine meant religious faith often became tied to a view of the social world as much as of the divine. Thus, the example of the Labour Church mirrors a more general shift to public causes and charity work on behalf of things such as orphanages, rescue homes, shelters, and youth clubs.

Just as religious beliefs are not doomed to vanish as history takes its course, so mature socialism need not be destined to take a secular form. The ethical socialism of the 1890s was not a utopian moment on the road to an allegedly scientific socialism, but rather a modern form of politics based on a modern theology. As Yeo recognises, it was not "a mere tributary feeding into a supposed mainstream," but a period with "its own special dynamism".[141] However, whereas Yeo sees the core feature of this ethical socialism as the use of socialism to fulfil the emotional role of a religion, I have focused on the place within it of an immanentist theology. The difference has important consequences. We have seen already how Yeo's focus means he draws into ethical socialism all talk of the religion of socialism and all expressions of a strong emotional attachment to the socialist movement. More importantly, his focus

encourages him to contrast the religion of socialism, understood as "a contagious working-class hope and practice," with an "elaborate party machine" that associated "its own well-being with the prospects for socialism."[142] Whilst there were, of course, important differences between the 1890s and the period thereafter, we cannot really identify the former with a creative, voluntary, local fellowship, and the latter with a sterile, bureaucratic, and self-interested party. Certainly, if we focus on theology, the history of ethical socialism becomes more complex. The immanentism underlying the Labour Church created problems of defining a suitable relationship to secular organisations, recognizing issues of agency, and devising policies to fill out the moral ideal, and these problems led to the Labour Church being torn apart by the competing demands of religious purity and political effectiveness. While socialists who emphasised religious purity, such as Trevor, found themselves at odds with the direction taken by the Labour Party, others who emphasized political effectiveness, such as Brocklehurst, played active roles within the Party.

Ethical socialism is neither a transient stop-over on the way to a mature secular socialism, nor a religious aspiration that became the prisoner of a cautious party-machine, but rather a tradition that arose in the 1890s, inspired many of those who worked to form the Labour Party, and has continued to thrive alongside other traditions in the Labour Party. Properly to understand British socialism and the Labour Party, we need to study developments in theology and socialist thought as they impacted on each other and on political institutions. We need to trace the ethical socialist tradition from the Labour Church and other bodies, such as the Christian Social Union, through those they influenced, like R. H. Tawney and John MacMurray, to their living descendants, such as Tony Blair.

[1] Labour Prophet, February 1893. The proceedings are in Report of the First General Conference of the I.L.P. Held at Bradford on 13 and 14 January 1893 (Glasgow, 1893).

[2] Workman's Times, 9 October 1891.

[3] Labour Prophet February 1892.

[4] Eric Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels (Manchester, 1959), esp. pp. 142-45; Henry Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900 (Oxford, 1966); and Stanley Pierson, "John Trevor and the Labour Church Movement in England, 1891-1900," Church History 29 (1960): 463-78.

[5] Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels; and Stanley Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism (Ithaca, N.Y., 1973). Even when scholars, such as Kenneth Inglis, query details of the orthodox view of the Labour Church, they do so from within this historiography. See Kenneth Inglis, "The Labour Church Movement," International Review of Social History 3 (1950): 445-60.

[6] For reviews of the linguistic turn and its impact on British history, see John Toews, "Intellectual History After the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," American Historical Review 92 (1987): 879-907; and James Thompson, "After the Fall: Class and Political Language 1780-1900," Historical Journal 39 (1996): 785-806. For works that problematize secularization, see Lucian Holscher, "Secularization and Urbanization in the Nineteenth Century: An Interpretative Model," in Hugh McLeod, ed., European Religion in the Age of Great Cities 1830-1930 (New York, 1995), pp. 263-88; and Jose Harris, Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870-1914 (Oxford, 1993), pp. 150-79.

[7] Chris Waters, British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture (Manchester, 1990); and Stephen Yeo, " A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896," History Workshop 4 (1977): 5-56.

[8] Yeo, "New Life," 38.

[9] Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, p. 142.

[10] For Trevor's background see his autobiography, My Quest for God (London, 1897), p. 241.

[11] Cited in Fenner Brockway, Socialism Over Sixty Years: The Life of Jowett of Bradford, 1864-1944 (London, 1946), p. 41. On the formation of the Bradford Church, see Labour Prophet, August and December 1892. It took over publication of the Bradford Labour Echo.

[12] Trevor said, "the Labour Church rested on Wicksteed's broad shoulders as long as I was connected with it." Charles Herford, Philip Henry Wicksteed (London, 1931), p. 225.

[13] Labour Prophet, May 1892.

[14] On Brocklehurst see Labour Annual (1895), p. 163. The first General Secretary of the Union was H. A. Atkinson, a few of whose papers are preserved in the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, mss. 143.

[15] Labour Prophet, April 1892.

[16] Labour Church Record, October 1899.

[17] Labour Prophet, August 1896.

[18] Labour Annual (1898), p. 193.

[19] Clarion, 11 January 1893; Kenneth Morgan, Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist (London, 1975).

[20] On atonement theology, see Boyd Hilton, The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865 (Oxford, 1988). On later developments, see Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, 2 vols. (London, 1971); James Moore, The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870-1900 (Cambridge, 1979); and Bernard Reardon, From Coleridge to Gore: A Century of Religious Thought in Britain (London, 1971). On various responses to the crisis of faith, see Lance St. John Butler, Victorian Doubt: Literary and Cultural Discourses (London, 1990); and Frank Turner, Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England (New Haven, Conn., 1974).

[21] eg. Charles Gore, The Reconstruction of Belief, 3 vols. (London, 1921-24).

[22] Reginald Campbell, The New Theology (London, 1907); John Illingworth, Divine Immanence: An Essay on the Spiritual Significance of Matter (London, 1898); and Helena Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy, 2 vols. (London, 1888).

[23] Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant, Philosophy, Politics, and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists (Oxford, 1984), esp. chap 2; and Sandra Den Otter, British Idealism and Social Explanation (Oxford, 1996).

[24] Michael Freeden, The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform (Oxford, 1978); and James Hinton, Life in Nature, intro. H. Ellis (London, 1932).

[25] See P. D'a. Jones, The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914 (Princeton, N.J., 1968); Standish Meacham, Toynbee Hall and Social Reform 1880-1914 (New Haven, Conn., 1987); Jose Harris, "Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940: An Intellectual Framework for British Social Policy," Past and Present 135 (1992): 116-41; Melvin Richter, The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and His Age (London, 1964); Stephan Collini, Liberalism and Sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England, 1880-1914 (Cambridge, 1979); Peter Weiler, The New Liberalism: Liberal Social Theory in Great Britain, 1896-1914 (New York, 1982); Phyllis Grosskurth, Havelock Ellis (London, 1980); and Sheila Rowbotham and Jeremy Weeks, Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis (London, 1977).

[26] Ian Mackillop, The British Ethical Societies (Cambridge, 1986); and Samuel Ratcliffe, The Story of South Place (London, 1955).

[27] Compare Mark Bevir, "Welfarism, Socialism, and Religion: On T. H. Green and Others," Review of Politics 55 (1993): 639-61; and Cheryl Walsh, "The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist Conscience in the Victorian Church of England," Journal of British Studies 34 (1995): 351-74.

[28] D. B. Foster, Socialism, the Christ and Truth (Leeds, 1921), p. 33.

[29] Edward Carpenter, Towards Democracy (London, 1985), p. 410. On Carpenter, see Chushichi Tsuzuki, Edward Carpenter, 1844-1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship (Cambridge, 1980).

[30] Workers' Cry, 2 May 1891.

[31] John Bruce Glasier, On the Road to Liberty (London, 1920), p. 33.

[32] Foster, Socialism, pp. 27, 28.

[33] William Jupp, Wayfarings: An Record of Adventure and Liberation in the Life of the Spirit (London, 1918).

[34] Percy Redfern, Journey to Understanding (London, 1946), p. 70.

[35] Foster, Socialism, p. 1.

[36] Trevor, My Quest, p. 152.

[37] D. B. Foster, The Logic of the Alliance (Leeds, n.d.), pp. 5, 6.

[38] Philip Wicksteed, "What Does the Labour Church Stand For?" Labour Prophet Tracts, Second Series, No. 1 (1896), p. 6.

[39] Labour Prophet, September 1896; John Trevor, Labour Prophet Tracts (London, 1896), Tract 1, p.13.

[40] Labour Prophet, September 1896.

[41] See, in particular, Charles Gore, ed., Lux Mundi (London, 1890).

[42] Sam Hobson, Possibilities of the Labour Church (Cardiff, 1893), pp. 4, 5.

[43] Trevor, Tracts, Tract 1, p. 8.

[44] Labour Church Record, July 1899.

[45] Redfern, Journey to Understanding, p. 70.

[46] Foster, Socialism, p. 1.

[47] Ibid., p. 27.

[48] Labour Prophet, March 1892.

[49] Margaret McMillan, Life of Rachel McMillan (London, 1927) p. 39.

[50] Wicksteed, What Does the Labour Church Stand For?, p. 3.

[51] Labour Prophet, January 1892.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Trevor, Tracts, Tract 2, p. 17.

[54] Labour Prophet, November 1894.

[55] David Summers, "The Labour Church and Allied Movements of the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries," University of Edinburgh, Ph.D. thesis, 1958, Appendix.

[56] Labour Prophet, December 1893.

[57] Labour Annual (1897), p. 166.

[58] Labour Prophet, January 1893.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., February 1894.

[63] Labour Prophet, March/April 1894; Labour Church Record, April 1899.

[64] Labour Prophet, September 1894

[65] See Annie Besant, An Autobiography (Adyar, Madras, 1983); Edward Carpenter, My Days and Dreams (London, 1916); Percival Chubb, On the Religious Frontier (New York, 1931); Foster, Socialism; Jupp, Wayfarings; Redfern, Journey to Understanding; and Trevor, My Quest.

[66] Jones, Christian Socialist Revival.

[67] Labour Prophet, May 1894.

[68] Ibid., June 1895.

[69] J. Trevor, ed., The Labour Church Hymn Book (London, 1895). Many Labour Churches printed their own hymn sheets, and the Birmingham Church reportedly printed a hymn book in 1894: see George Barnsby, Birmingham Working People (Wolverhampton, 1989), pp. 258-61.

[70] Labour Prophet, June 1895.

[71] Sam Hobson, Pilgrim to the Left (London, 1938), p. 41.

[72] Labour Prophet, June 1895.

[73] See, more generally, Waters, British Socialists, pp. 65-96.

[74] For Trevor's enthusiasm for Sunday Schools, see Labour Prophet, July 1895. On the broader movement, see Fred Reid, "Socialist Sunday Schools in Britain, 1892-1939," International Review of Social History 2 (1966), 18-47.

[75] Labour Prophet, April 1892; and McMillan, Rachel McMillan, pp. 38-41. On McMillan, see Carolyn Steedman, Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan 1860-1931 (London, 1990).

[76] Clarion, 28 March, 4 and 11 April 1996, and 6, 20, and 27 March, 24 April 1997.

[77] Labour Prophet, September 1893.

[78] Minute Books of the Birmingham Labour Church 1894-1910, Birmingham Central Library, mss. 538059-62:ZZ72A, 1896.

[79] Labour Prophet, April 1893.

[80] Labour Church Record, July 1899.

[81] D. B. Foster, Leeds Slumdom, with photographs by W. Swift (Leeds, 1897).

[82] Labour Prophet, February 1893.

[83] The idea of Cinderella Clubs originated in the Clarion movement, but clubs were also established or taken over by Labour Churches. The first Cinderella Supplement designed for children appeared in Ibid., May 1893.

[84] Redfern, Journey to Understanding, p. 111.

[85] For the activities of the Birmingham Cinderella Club, see Annual Reports of the Birmingham Cinderella Club 1896-1928, Birmingham Central Library, mss. 154722:L41.23.

[86] Labour Church Record, July 1899.

[87] Ibid., July 1900.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Labour Prophet, May 1892 and November 1894.

[90] Ibid., February 1893.

[91] David Lowe, Souvenirs of Labour (Glasgow, 1919), p. 97. Redfern later wrote: "'A jolly good idea, this Labour Church,' said one of its destroyers. 'With a prayer and a couple of hymns thrown in you get a socialist lecture to thousands whom otherwise you'd never see." Redfern, Journey to Understanding, p. 71.

[92] Labour Prophet, April 1895.

[93] Ibid., March 1892.

[94] Ibid., May 1892.

[95] Ibid., May 1893; Hobson, Pilgrim; Leek Times, 12 December 1896.

[96] Redfern, Journey to Understanding, p. 100.

[97] See Stanley Pierson, British Socialists: The Journey from Fantasy to Politics (Cambridge, Mass., 1979); and Yeo, "New Life".

[98] Compare Summers, "The Labour Church," Appendix, p. 311

[99] Ibid., p. 401.

[100] Labour Church Record, July 1899.

[101] See Labour Prophet, May 1895 and December 1897.

[102] Labour Church Record, July 1899.

[103] Labour Prophet, January 1893.

[104] Labour Church Record, July 1900.

[105] Summers, "The Labour Church", Appendix.

[106] Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, p. 138.

[107] Minute Books of the Birmingham Labour Church, esp. 1904-1910.

[108] See Inglis, "Labour Church Movement," 449.

[109] See the few surviving letters written by Trevor held in the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, mss. 143.

[110] The Inquirer, November 1923.

[111] Herford, Wicksteed, p. 179.

[112] Redfern, Journey to Understanding, esp. pp. 54-5 and 103-4.

[113] Hobson, Pilgrim, p. 290.

[114] Foster, Socialism, p. 56.

[115] Labour Prophet, May 1895.

[116] Tsuzuki, Carpenter, eg. pp. 152, 163-65; and Chubb, Religious Frontier, p. 158.

[117] David Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906 (Manchester, 1983), esp. pp. 301-26.

[118] Workman's Times, 23 October 1891.

[119] Labour Prophet, December 1893.

[120] Ibid., January 1894.

[121] Ibid., June 1895.

[122] Ibid.

[123] See, for instance, Ibid., March 1898. The issue of prayer eventually was left to the discretion of individual chairmen. See Ibid., June 1895.

[124] Ibid., August 1893.

[125] Ibid., December 1894.

[126] Labour Church Record, April 1899; Foster, Socialism, p. 33.

[127] Redfern, Journey to Understanding, p. 101.

[128] Leek Times, 19 December 1896; Trevor, Tracts, Tract 4, p. 5.

[129] Labour Prophet, May 1895.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Hobson, Pilgrim, p. 264.

[132] Labour Prophet, November 1894.

[133] See Inglis, "Labour Church Movement," 457.

[134] Labour Church Record, April 1901.

[135] Cited in Pierson, "John Trevor and the Labour Church," 475.

[136] See John Trevor, The One Life (Horsted Keynes, Eng., 1909).

[137] Labour Church Record, January 1901.

[138] Foster, Socialism, p. 49.

[139] Clarion, 9 February 1906.

[140] Harris, Private Lives, Public Spirit, p. 166.

[141] Yeo, "New Life," 7.

[142] Ibid., 31.