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Are the Principles Taught by Jesus Christ Advantageous to the Working Class?

Christianity a Slave's Creed

Debate Between Harrington and Cook.

The Empress Theatre (Vancouver) on Sunday, the 8th May, was crowded to overflowing five minutes after the doors opened at 2.30 p.m. The debate was scheduled to commence at 3 o'clock. Many hundreds of people were unable to gain entrance.

President Klinck of the University of B. C. occupied the chair, and announced Rev. A. E. Cook as speaker in the affirmative, and Comrade Harrington in the negative; Mr. Cook to speak first for 45 minutes, followed by Harrington for 45 minutes. After the collection, Cook to speak 15 minutes followed by Harrington, the debate to be closed by Cook in a closing speech of 10 minutes.

Mr. Cook opened by announcing that he intended to base his case on the four gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These comprised the doctrine of Christianity. The doctrine of Christianity was the commonwealth of God and man on earth. Its application was that in public life public leaders should be public servants; the poor should inherit the earth. Its ultimate aim was love, service and equality—not force—coercion and inequality. Each man should have the fullest expression of his personality. The Socialist keynote to him was justice, democracy, brotherhood. This was covered by the golden rule—goodwill and mutual service between man and man. The brotherhood of man was a Socialist aim. Christ was the originator of this idea. Christ was the original revolutionist. He was the forerunner of Marx and was the founder of democratic principles. The endurance of these principles had swept aside chattel slavery and feudalism and had inaugurated and sustained what was good in our present day civilization. Socialists recognized that despite the value of their own doctrines and formulas they owed it to Christ's teachings that the ideal of human brotherhood was maintained. Christ was of the common people. He moved among them. He was a carpenter by trade. His was a revolutionary doctrine. He taught the universal fatherhood of God. Deeper than economic doctrine lay morals and spiritual courage. Each man was "captain of his fate and master of his soul." In this lay his spiritual equality. This was the root principle of the cries Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; the Magna Charta, the Rights of Man. The truth would make men free. Christianity was out to turn the present competitive system up-side down. It was true that there were Christian men in the ranks of both capital and labor. They co-operated in public service. The competitive system compelled the capitalist to be dishonest. In reality there was no wealth but life. Material things were insufficient. Money, power—social position—these conditions meant nothing if there was not too, spiritual enlightenment. Man must love the highest good he knew. Mrs. Browning said "Life develops from within." Environment was not final. It was not the cure. It would not operate without the change in heart. The thief, drunkard, criminal, political grafter all existed no matter what were the conditions—moral character was the essential.

Comrade Harrington said that the debate was in his opinion somewhat narrowed by the terms laid

down, but Mr. Cook confined it within the canonical gospels. But the slavery of ancient Rome had been introduced and he claimed the right to traverse the same ground. Religion in the form of Christianity, rather than being the continuous identical concept of equality, brotherhood, justice and so forth as outlined by Mr. Cook, changed with changing conditions and conformed always in the minds of men to their surroundings, the degree of their knowledge of nature's forces—the period in which they lived. And Christianity, from the time of its inception until today, was embraced as a slave creed by the working class and used by a master class wherever possible to stifle the spirit of revolt against the property concept wherever it arose. For the purposes of the debate, and only for these purposes, he intended to assume for the time being that Christ had lived and had been crucified. The validity of this claim was actually questionable but for the present he did not intend to concern himself with that. He would take Christianity as it was at the time of its inception and examine its records. The materialist interpretation of the history of any creed or religion lay in the examination of the historical period in which it prevailed. So far as biblical records were concerned the epistles of Peter and Paul were more worthy documents and in some respects had chronological precedence over the gospels. These epistles outlined the principles of early Christianity as they were propounded in Palestine under Roman sway. To understand Christian teachings we must understand the conditions prevailing at that period. Italy was then inhabited by a civilization, so too was part of the Greek peninsula and part of Asia Minor. Outside of these areas was barbarism. The Roman Empire fell. Patrician and Plebeian strife finally ended the last vestiges of what had remained of communal society. Mr. Cook had claimed Christ as the first to lay down a doctrine of brotherhood among men. This had no foundation in fact. The brotherhood of man had been a living fact until private property in the means of life entered upon the stage of human development. Until that stage blood relationship had been a bond between man and man. It had not been an essential bond since and it was not now. Christ's advent was not until a thousand years after that stage. Rome was then torn by civil wars. Rome was a slave empire. Under Roman conquest, captives were sold as slaves, but never—as in Christian civilization—had a ship sailed from a port of the Roman Empire for the purpose of buying slaves. That infamy could not be charged against pagan Rome. The only civilization that charge could be made against was a Christian civilization. The civilization of Rome, built upon the backs of slaves, had established itself in civil wars and class struggles. It endured terrible periods in the life of its people. The shivering savages who carried us through the ice age had not endured such suffering as the people of Rome under Tiberius, Claudius, Nero, Lucilla. The new gospel—Christianity—took root in Rome in a period of misery among slaves. It taught that the earth was but a stopping place; death was the door through which men passed to glorious eternal life in heaven. All the pleasures conceivable were given

to a person who "laid not up for himself treasures on earth." This was a solace in a hopeless slave society. It was accepted by the slaves. It was a comfort to the slaves. It was a slave creed—a slave religion. The doctrine was set in fruitful soil and ripened admirably. As a religion of slaves, in Rome, it was beneath the contempt of the noble. It was held by slaves and propagated by slaves. Yet in the four gospels and in the epistles of Peter and Paul, not one word was to be found in condemnation of slavery as a system of society. While it extolled charity it nowhere denounced the conditions that rendered charity necessary. The rights of master over slave were recognized by the disciples. During 300 years of religious strife, in obliterating the hold of other religions on the slave mind, Christianity earned the contempt of the Pagan philosophers as a slaves' creed, as such, a citizen of Rome could have naught to do with it. For the worker it operated to cloud his mind. It taught submission to every form of cruelty and oppression. It taught the righteousness of slave submission to a master's rule and consequently, rather than its doctrines being advantageous to the working class they were false to its interests.

Mr. Cook's next speech was taken up in elaborating his outline as above stated.

Comrade Harrington said the Biblical utterances were made disjointedly in the Jewish tongue, written in Latin, translated into Greek and re-translated into English. The revised version—so-called—presented no more the words of Christ than the version of James VI. Kipling's complaint that American English did not represent his writings was in itself illustrative in a small degree of the magnitude of error that was possible in the case of documents written so long ago and compiled under such diverse circumstances and changing periods. Mr. Cook had mentioned Wilberforce as an example of Christian concepts in practise. His practical efforts were towards the abolition of the slave trade. How fine a creature was this man who, when the bill was introduced to abolish child slavery, rather than vote for it, and without courage to vote against it, had walked out of the house. So much for spiritual regeneration. Slavery was not doomed through the spreading of Christ's teachings. It was a long time alive. It was alive today after 2,000 years of Christian doctrine and precept. From the tropical regions of the earth to the ice regions of the north, wherever you find man you will find him in his ignorant state clinging to whatever gods his superstition had erected around him. He made his own gods, the gods did not make him, and the degree of his understanding the condition around him and the forces of nature, determined what manner of gods they were. But man was forever wrestling with the elements. The development of man could be traced from one form of life. Embryology demonstrated that man's present form and shape was not eternal. Every shape assumed, demonstrated the evolution of man from a common parent form. In his growth to his present state all the comforts of civilization have come to man through his own efforts to understand the forces of nature and to harness them to his own needs. His support and enlightenment came through his

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