

# Why Am I a Christian Socialist?

William D. P. Bliss

October 2, 1890

Because I was made a Christian by Karl Marx and a Socialist by Jesus Christ. I do not strive to be paradoxical; to me this is a life-fact.

I had supposed myself a Christian long before I read Karl Marx. I called myself one; I believed in Christ; I worshipped Him; I prayed to Him; I preached Him; I did everything except follow Him—in other words I was anything *except a Christian*.

But one day I became interested in Socialism, especially in Karl Marx. He produced on me a deep impression. I began to see what life was. A veil arose. Suddenly, as I was thinking, it flashed on me what Christ was, and what Christianity was. The cross was its centre. Christianity was the attainment of the highest ideal for the world, and the highest individuality for each person through the sacrifice of the individual. Those that seek life lose it, and those that sacrifice life for the good of all, find it. Such was the secret of Christianity, a life. Henceforth I have striven to be a Christian.

But I was not yet a Socialist. Karl Marx had not made me one. I was afraid of his system. I began to study. But gradually it came to me, that, starting with Christ, one must come out a Socialist. Jesus made me a Socialist. Socialism seems to me the form society must take that is based on sacrifice of the individual, while its outcome will be the highest individuality.

Tolstoi, the Christian Anarchist, seems to me to follow the letter, but not the spirit of Christ. Jesus Christ taught Brotherhood. Tolstoi is a grand sentimental Individualist who feels but does not think. All Anarchism seems to me the utmost assertion of self; Socialism the abnegation of self. The end of Anarchism must be, I think, the despotic rule of the mightiest individual. The end of Socialism, freedom for each and for all.

Thus far I have told you how I became a Christian Socialist rather than why I am one. I have done so, because I am enough at once of a Hegelian and a Positivist to believe that a concrete life-fact is also the most real thought-fact. However, in as few words as I can, I will try to tell you why I believe in Christian Socialism. As it is a two-fold concept, I shall have to give it a two-fold answer.

First, I am a Christian because I am a Rationalist. It seems to me the reasonable thing to be. In judging truth, I put neither Christ nor Bible nor Church nor faith nor anything else above reason. My reason may be mistaken, but it is all I have to go by, and by it I propose to go. Now, by evidence of history, science and modern psychic research, it seems to me proven that over the kingdoms of the inorganic and organic, is the kingdom of spirit. To me it seems equally proven

on rational evidence that there runs through all the universe of matter, mind, and spirit, a unity fathomless, mystic, infinite. That unity I call God. Studying God through facts, I dare to try to understand him through a study of his highest manifestation, man. As there is a personality in man, I believe there is in God, since a part cannot be greater than the whole. I thus come to believe in a spiritual personal God. The best men that I know cause suffering to their children (e.g., sending of a child away from home to school) for the children's good. Hence I explain God's allowance of human sorrow. The wisest early parents that I know also allow their children to a large extent to work out their own life problems instead of solving everything for them. So I believe God allows the world to stumble toward truth instead of making the world perfect in all things at once. If the sorrow and suffering seem great for a loving God to allow, we must remember that on the evolutionary philosophy our life here is but a moment in the developing true life. Sin I call ignorance. I do not thus deny human responsibility. I believe men to be often responsible for ignorance (ministers for example on social questions) but much that people call sin since I do not consider men responsible for. The more I see of the world and of life, the more I love and admire and believe in human nature, especially among the working classes, who live closer to honest, simple ways. Even the street walker of the city, if often, I am convinced, more virtuous in the true sense than many a fashionable wife. People are not wholly, but largely, what circumstances make them. People cannot live the Golden Rule by themselves. It is impossible to apply it to a market based upon competition. Christ never intended men to be perfect by themselves. That would develop Phariseism and religious selfness. Protestant Individualism consistently runs to Phariseism. Christ's law is a social law. No man can live to himself alone. Evolution is God developing a perfect whole, and perfect in every part. Such, in brief, is my theodicy.

Christ seems to me the highest and thus far the only perfect manifestation of God. Personally I believe Him to have been virgin born, though I think it makes little difference how he was born; the main questions are, *How did He live?* And *Are we living like Him?* I believe in what people call the miraculous. It seems to me the most natural thing in the world, simply the coming down of the spiritual into the organic, exactly as the organic runs its roots down into the inorganic. I do not believe in all Bible miracles, and I do believe in some modern miracles. To me it all a matter of evidence. What we call miracles being the thing naturally to be looked for in so spiritual a man as Christ, I find satisfactory evidence that He was a Miracle Worker, and I believe that He rose from the dead a spiritized body. To me He is the one God-manifested ideal Master-man. Hence I try to follow him. This is why I am a Christian. The Bible I believe to be a very fallible, but often, also, a very inspired divine word; divine in the sense that man is. Why I am a socialist I can state more briefly. Again it is because it seem to the reasonable thing to be. Two and two make four, and often are as good as eight. Two form two leaves nothing, and often less than nothing. This seems to me the difference between Socialism and Anarchism.

Working together is better than pulling apart. But you will say: "Anarchists do not object to combination, provided it is voluntary combination. Socialism is involuntary combination, or Paternalism, that is, despotism." I deny this. Socialism is not Paternalism. By its derivation, its history, its root idea, it is essentially democratic. It is brotherhoodism. A paternal Socialist is a self-contradiction. To call Bismarck a Socialist argues utmost ignorance. Witness the one million five hundred thousand votes of true German Socialists against the paternal despotism of Emperor William and of Bismarck. Socialism in America is not turning everything over to Uncle Same, and teasing him for candy, or for office, *unless Uncle Sam be the people*. Socialism is not

even the rule of the majority. It is the rule of *all*. It believe in minority representation, and in the referendum. It is the community doing its own business, controlling its own affairs, and as a whole.

But you say, will not this lead to despotism? Suppose a man does not want to be part of such a Government, then what? Should he be compelled to pay taxes? We answer no. Only he would have no part in land or business that involves any exchange. He can do what he likes individually, but he cannot interfere with things that pertain to the whole.

Anarchism, on the other hand, beginning with superficial freedom, would end, we believe, in the rule of the strongest few and the subserviency of the rest to them. This is largely what we have today. Mr. Carnegie argues that he and a few of his friends are the smartest money makers raised up of God to rob other people and then to use their robbings for the popular good. This is pure paternalism and consistent Anarchism. Socialism is the foe of Paternalism. One cannot get away from rule. It must be either the rule of might or the rule of brotherhood. Till men are perfect you can find perfection under neither rule. But even as men are, we prefer the rule of all to the rule of might. Says Mr. Donisthorpe, the English Anarchist: "It is a mistake to suppose that Anarchism is lawless. Nothing of the kind... Where there is no ruling body, where there is no governmental authority, as in San Francisco, within the memory of many of us, what happens? Did the marauders and posts of society carry all before them? Not a bit of it. those who had inherited the habits of a social and methodical mode of life, owing to its greater average economy, banded themselves together and straightway lynched those who were desirous of violating the principles of order and method." He adds: "This was Anarchism." Exactly, and we prefer Uncle Sam, with all his faults, to Judge Lynch. Anarchism is the mirage of freedom that tempts the foolish and a few master minds led away by the pride of intellect from common sense to abstruse theorizing. But the philosophy of Christ was deeper, that whosoever would find his life (individuality) should lose it, and whosoever will lose his life shall find it. By self-renunciation for the good of all, not by self-seeking, do we come to our true selves.

History, too, to my thinking, furnishes deepest argument for Socialilsm, pointing out the gradual development of the social organism, out of a number of lower organisms, men and women.

Hence, because reason bids me, because Christ lead, because history speaks, because the hungry call, because the weak have need, because the children perish, because the poor are brothers of mine, I do what I can for Christian Socialism.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)  
Anti-Copyright



William D. P. Bliss  
Why Am I a Christian Socialist?  
October 2, 1890

[https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/christian-socialism/  
rev-w-d-p-bliss-why-am-i-a-christian-socialist-1890/](https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/christian-socialism/rev-w-d-p-bliss-why-am-i-a-christian-socialist-1890/)  
Rev. W. D. P. Bliss, "Why Am I a Christian Socialist?" *Twentieth Century* 5 (October 2, 1890): 5.

[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](http://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)