

Religion in the Working Class Community, and the Evolution of Socialism in Late Nineteenth Century Lancashire: A Case of Working Class Consciousness

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The Bible is full of revolutionary teaching, and it is not surprising that, in a country where thought is free, many men and women have drawn from it the support which they needed for their instinctive revolt against the inhuman conditions which Capitalism brings. I think that probably the majority of those who have built up the socialist movement in this country have been adherents of the Christian religion...

C.R. ATTLEE, *The Labour Party in Perspective* (1937) p. 27.

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A number of ambiguities surrounding religion amongst the working class of late nineteenth century Lancashire suggest that a statement of clarification is necessary, particularly regarding the relationship between religious ideals and the developing socialist consciousness of the 1890s. Firstly, since the appearance of Professor Inglis' influential *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, it has become commonplace, by drawing upon sources of church attendance such as the 1851 religious census, to suggest that the churches had but little impact upon the masses of the provincial manufacturing centres. This position, however, needs to be reconciled with that of commentators such as P.F. Clarke, who has noted that, "In the north west, religion was probably associated with politics more closely than in any other part of Britain."¹ Secondly, and in response to the growth of popular Conservatism in Lancashire after 1868, there has been a clear tendency to examine religion primarily in relation to the Irish question. The revival of the Church of England in the later decades of the century has prompted several historians to remark upon the pronounced Anglican, and hence Conservative, bias of the Lancashire working class.² This has perhaps detracted from the deep root-

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¹ *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971) p. 53; for the role of religion in Lancashire politics, see further H. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections*, (London, 1967) pp. 239-287.

² H. PELLING and F. BEALEY, *Labour and Politics, 1900-1906*. (London, 1958) pp. 2-9. In general, this book tends to underemphasise the role played by Nonconformity in the shaping of Lancashire socialist politics.

ing of Nonconformity in many Lancashire communities,³ and in particular, its impact upon the emerging socialist movement primarily a feature of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Scotland, and Lancashire. For there can be little doubt that the major themes of this socialist current — as propagated by the Independent Labour Party, Robert Blatchford's *Clarion* newspaper and the various Clarion associations, the Labour Church movement and the socialist Sundry schools — were in a broad sense "religious". Stanley Pierson has recently termed this movement "ethical" socialism.⁴ This represents, of course, a problem of "working class consciousness," the debate surrounding which has until recently been conducted on a fairly general level.⁵ There would now seem to be a case for narrowing the focus of attention.

There is a strong contrast in British labour history between the radical-secular, and dissenting-Methodist traditions, the latter based in the provinces and leading most naturally to the socialism of the I.L.P.⁶ In respect of this tradition, two explanations are current. In the first place, a number of commentators have followed Sam Hobson, who, in recalling his involvement during these years, suggested that I.L.P. socialism appeared just at the moment that Nonconformity was losing its hold on the working class of northern England. To this fact he attributes "... the sublime faith these men and women had in the I.L.P. creed."⁷ More recently, Henry Pelling has elaborated upon this argument. Dr. Pelling outlines the processes whereby "...religion seemed to be departing from the life of the lower classes." and alongside which occurred "...as a symptom of religious decline... the transference of religious enthusiasm to the political sphere."⁸ Ethical socialism, most clearly exemplified in the Labour

³ It will not be our concern in this article to explore in any depth the contribution of any particular Nonconformist denomination to working class life or socialist politics. Methodism, and in particular the more democratic off-shoots from the parent body such as the Primitive Methodists, were of most significance. Baptists were also numerous among the Lancashire population, and have been examined by J. Lea, "Baptists and the Working Classes in Mid-Victorian Lancashire," in S.P. BELL, ed., *Victorian Lancashire*, (London, 1974) pp. 59-82.

⁴ *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism*, (London, 1973) pp. 140-173; 198-204; 226-245.

⁵ More detailed and localised studies of working class consciousness are beginning to emerge. See further, R.Q. GRAY, "Styles of Life, the "Labour Aristocracy" and Class Relations in later Nineteenth Century Edinburgh," in *International Review of Social History*, Vol. XVIII, (1973): 428-452; G. CROSSICK, "The Labour Aristocracy and its Values: A Study of Mid-Victorian Kentish London," in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. XIX (1976): 301-328; J.M. COUSINS and R.L. DAVIES, "'Working Class Incorporation': A Historical Approach with Reference to the Mining Communities of S.E. Northumberland, 1840-1890," in F. PARKIN, ed., *The Social Analysis of Class Structure*, (London, 1974): 275-297.

⁶ E. HOBSBAWM, "Labour Traditions," in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, (London, 1972) pp. 372-73.

⁷ *Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist*, (London, 1938) pp. 38-39.

⁸ H. PELLING, *Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900*, (Oxford, 1965) pp. 130, 142. It is basic to Pelling's argument that political enthusiasm replaced religious fervour among the working class. It will be suggested here, by contrast, that socialism may perhaps be more correctly seen as *growing out of* and thus affording new relevance to religious themes basic to working class life. Religion then retained much of its relevance, albeit in a new form; see below section V.

Church movement founded by John Trevor in Manchester in October, 1891, took the place that religion had previously held in working class life. Some Marxist historians, on the other hand, have followed Lenin's and Trotsky's observations on British labour in explaining the intimate relationship between religion and socialist beliefs by reference to the domination of the working class movement by a "labour aristocracy."⁹ It is suggested that this small, albeit influential, upper stratum of the working class — founded upon institutions such as church and chapel, friendly and benefit societies, craft and New Model unionism; ideologically permeated by notions of bourgeois religion, respectability and liberalism; and lending their support to reformist political demands — provided many leaders for, and lent its distinctive tone and orientation to, the working class movement.

Both arguments share a common tendency to minimise the depth and intensity of religious sentiment within the main body of the working class. The former is premised upon the assumed secularisation of the working class in the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the concomitant rechannelling of moral fervour, and the latter confines religiosity to a small aristocracy of labour ideologically predisposed by its social and economic location. The present argument will question the adequacy of these explanations by raising and exploring two related sets of ideas.

i.) The place and role of Nonconformity amongst the Lancashire working class. In many predominantly working class communities in the east and north east, and by no means absent from "Metropolitan Lancashire," the mainly industrialised and urbanised south of the county, religious institutions were well established in working class life. We shall need to examine the working class chapel rather broadly, for it was more than a "religious" body pure and simple, but often an all round social institution. Religious sentiment was also, perhaps, more widespread than has been assumed, and again it will be necessary to enlarge our conception of what counted as "religious" for working people. Statements based upon statistics of attendance or non-attendance are little real indication of the true depth of feeling, and we shall be concerned to situate religion within the social life of the working class — evidence on this score may be gleaned from autobiography, recollections and descriptions of life in Lancashire working class communities.¹⁰

⁹ V.I. LENIN, *British Labour and British Imperialism*, (London, 1969) for instance pp. 98-99; L. TROTSKY, *On Britain*, (New York, 1973) especially the essay "Where is Britain Going?" (1925). The religious predilections of the labour aristocracy may be traced back to Frederick ENGELS *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, (London, 1972) p. 155, where Engels considers religion among the workers to be confined to "...the half-bourgeois, the overlookers, foremen and the like." For a recent application of the labour aristocracy thesis, stressing the chapel as one institution specific to this culture, see J.O. FOSTER, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in three English Towns*, (London, 1974) pp. 212-238.

¹⁰ For the limitations of attendance statistics, see H. MCLEOD, *Class and Religion in the late Victorian City*, (London, 1974) pp. 24-25.

ii.) The problem of working class consciousness. While by no means a non-problematic area, there has been a clear trend in the practice of labour historiography to avoid confronting in depth the subtleties and dynamics of social consciousness.¹¹ We shall suggest that the origins and development of working class consciousness must be tackled in the context of the institutions and social relationships specific to working class life, for ideas only gain any degree of social effectiveness given institutional embodiment, but the process involved is a complex one of "cultural struggle" and adaptation. The chapel in Lancashire was one institution in that cultural matrix from which may be said to have emerged a specific form of consciousness.

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Many commentators have been content to follow the broad conclusions of Inglis' study in identifying a profound alienation in Victorian England between the urban working class and the churches. The general absence of the labouring population, strikingly confirmed by the census of church attendance of 1851, became the major concern of most churchmen in the decades following. These years saw a wide measure of debate within orthodox Christianity regarding its relation to the urban proletariat, and in some instances, vigorous efforts to rectify the imbalance. By the turn of the century the churches could claim but little success in increasing their lower class attendance. The worst fears of clergymen were reinforced by the protestations of infidelity often voiced by working men and their representatives. Engels had professed to detect in 1844 "...almost universally a total indifference to religion..." amongst the masses, and in 1855 Marx portrayed English anti-clericalism as having "...the character of a *class struggle* waged by the poor against the rich..."¹² And there was indeed no shortage of criticism of religion from within the ranks of organised labour and the working class. "Marxian" in *The Workmans Times* of 1891, for instance, made public the feelings of many working men about the sincerity of religion and church-goers, "If Jesus were to revisit this world, at say, St. Paul's or Trafalgar, those middle class Christians would be the first to yell for his blood"¹³ while A. M. Thompson of *The Clarion* considered that, until the emergence of the Labour Churches, religion, "...had become so identified within my observation with black clothes, kit gloves, tall silk hats and long faces, that it and I appeared to

¹¹ Most commonly, the tendency has been to *dichotomise* working class consciousness, e.g. "trade union/socialist consciousness," and these become discrete categories, allowing for no intermediary states or transitional forms. Otherwise perceptive historians have shown themselves remarkably lax in tackling the complexities of social consciousness; a notorious example may be found in G.D.H. COLE and R. POSTGATE, *The British Common People, 1746-1946*, (London, 1961) p. 270: "Psychologically, the great majority of the British working class was in those years, and for fifteen or more years to come, diseased; as it indeed always had been in a greater or lesser degree since the eighteenth century equilibrium had been broken up."

¹² ENGELS, *The Condition of the Working Class*, p. 155; K. MARX, *Articles on Britain*, (Moscow, 1971) pp. 240-41.

¹³ *The Workmans Times*, 7 November 1891.

have parted for ever."¹⁴ Even Keir Hardie was moved on one occasion to refer to the churches as "the reflex of modern business", and many of these themes were echoed in various socialist tracts and pamphlets of the time which addressed themselves to the question of labour's relationship with orthodox religion.¹⁵ In 1906 George Haw, in a book called *Christianity and the Working Classes*, was able to portray a wide measure of indifference and hostility to church institutions among the working class.

There would seem *prima facie* little evidence exempting late nineteenth century Lancashire from this general picture of popular irreligion, or at least more indifference. The religious census had clearly shown the provincial manufacturing centres to be areas of lowest church attendance, and this included every large town in Lancashire with the exceptions, and this included every large town in Lancashire with the exceptions, of Wigan and Rochdale alone.¹⁶ A survey conducted by *The Bolton Weekly Journal* in 1896 found, that of 80,000 who might have attended church or chapel on Sunday, 22 December of that year, only 14,000 chose in actual fact to do so.¹⁷ Robert Roberts has recalled of Salford around the turn of the century that the process separating religion from the working population was clearly in evidence,¹⁸

...it seemed that by the early years of the twentieth century churches and chapels had little to offer that would attract much longer those from the lower multitudes... the moral authority of religious establishment, though still not openly questioned, was at least being quietly ignored by more and more members of the manual working class.

Lancashire had been, of course, one stronghold of the middle class Nonconformist-Liberal "alliance", but insofar as this drew in the working class, it had suffered a number of setbacks. Some Lancashire working men, for instance, engineers, miners, and especially cotton spinners, had turned to the Conservative Party, but many more, it has been recently suggested, were swept along by "a gale of hysterical Protestantism," whipped up in response to Gladstone's proposals for Irish Church disestablishment in 1868.¹⁹ Certainly, it is true that Lancashire working men and women were growing increasingly suspicious of a religion all too clearly associated with their employer class — a manifest hypocrisy which could no longer be ignored. "The Nonconformist manufacturers of Lancashire and Yorkshire", remembered one socialist activist of the time, "prayed for and generally with us on Sundays, and preyed on

¹⁴ *The Labour Prophet*, November 1893, p. 105.

¹⁵ K. HARDIE, *The Labour Leader*, 17 February 1900; see further T. MANN, *A Socialist View of Religion and the Churches*, (1896); K. HARDIE, *Can a Man be a Christian on a Pound a Week?* [n.d.].

¹⁶ K.S. INGLIS, "Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XI, (1960) pp. 84-85.

¹⁷ Cited in A. CLARKE (Teddy Ashton), *The Effects of the Factory System*, (London, 1899) p. 142.

¹⁸ *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century*, (London, 1974) p. 175.

¹⁹ R.L. GREENALL, "Popular Conservatism in Salford, 1868-1886," *Northern History*, IX, (1974) p. 131.

us for the rest of the week."²⁰ Nonconformists in any case seemed out of touch with working class life. They appeared rigid and puritanical, bent on frustrating the working man's legitimate pleasures by their agitation to restrict licensing hours, against the music halls and theatres so popular in the Lancashire mill towns, Sunday railway excursions and opening of art galleries and museums. As socialist ideas began to gain currency in the eighties and nineties, Nonconformity further removed itself from the working class by insistence upon its traditional individualistic ethic.²¹ It might be plausibly argued, then, that religious commitment, at least to the various Nonconformist denominations, was singularly lacking in Lancashire by the end of the century.

Such conclusions would be hasty. While indisputably, hostility to the religious establishment was greater than it had been, it cannot be assumed that ideas and sentiments of fundamentally religious significance had been expelled without trace from working class life, and it becomes important to explore a number of confusions surrounding popular religiosity. In the first instance, that aspect of the secularisation thesis which has seen the increasingly marginal social role of religion as an inevitable concomitant of the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, warrants careful attention.²² Lancashire, home of the industrial revolution, cotton, and Engels' "classic soil" of capitalist production, has frequently been pictured as the *locus classicus* of large scale industrialisation with all its attendant features — the mill towns, a proletarianised work force, poverty and poor housing, and in consequence, popular religious indifference. It needs to be recalled that a surprising variety of productive situations existed well into the nineteenth century, and the large industrial towns — Manchester and Salford, Liverpool, Bolton, Preston or Oldham, for instance — were by no means typical. By far the majority of early cotton spinning and weaving concerns were country mills, situated in the industrial villages and small towns in the north and north east of the county, on the Pennine uplands, or in the rural districts surrounding the larger towns.²³ Angus Bethune Reach in 1849 reported of Lancashire for *The Morning Chronicle* that,²⁴

...thickly sprinkled amid the oak-coppiced vales of Lancashire, with the whitewashed cottages of the workpeople gleaming through the branches and beside the rapid stream, or perched high on the breezy forehead of a hill, are to be seen hundreds on

²⁰ HOBSON, *Pilgrim to the Left*, p. 24.

²¹ D.M. THOMPSON, *Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century*, (London, 1972) p. 13 on Nonconformity's alienation from the working class; for its individualism, see J.F. GLASER, "English Nonconformity and the Decline of Liberalism," *American Historical Review*, LXIII, (1958) p. 358.

²² For the secularisation thesis in religious sociology, see B.R. WILSON, *Religion in a Secular Society*, (London, 1966); A. MACINTYRE, "Secularisation," in *The Listener*, 15 February 1968, and the same author's *Secularisation and Moral Change*, (Newcastle, 1967).

²³ As late as 1929, a description of the Lancashire cotton industry was able to point out that it was "...particularly associated with the smaller town in the country, and the rural districts surrounding the larger towns;" see further, H. Clay and K.R. BRADY, *Manchester at Work: A Survey*, (Manchester, 1929) p. 94.

²⁴ A.B. REACH, *Manchester and the Textile Districts in 1849*, ed., C. Aspin, (Helmshore, 1972) p. 65.

hundreds of busily working cotton mills. In the vicinity are no fetid alleys, no grimy courts, no dark area or underground cellars. Even the smoke from the tall chimneys passes tolerably innocuously away — sometimes, perhaps, when the air is calm and heavy, dotting the grass and the leaves with copious showers of 'blacks', but never seriously smirching nor blighting the dewy freshness of the fields and hedgerows, through which the spinner and the weaver pass their daily toil.

As late as the 1870s and 1880s, mill workers like Annie Fernhead, who worked at the Rheddish Mill in Gorton, near Manchester, might live amongst rural surroundings,²⁵ and in many similar areas throughout Lancashire, a traditional way of life co-existed with the partial domination of the new mode of production. It is true that the size of towns grew rapidly under the impetus of the progressive centralisation of the cotton industry, and after mid-century, the country mills began to give way increasingly to those powered by steam,²⁶ but much production continued in the smaller towns and villages where, in any case, a recent semi-rural past ensured that traditions deeply rooted in popular life might survive. From the towns of the Rossendale valley in the north east, to the villages and outworker colonies scattered around the major centres in the south, religion was integral to these smaller communities and had managed to retain much of its vitality even by the turn of the century.²⁷

Nor can it be assumed, as it so often is, that infidelity inevitably follows from the fact of large scale urbanisation, although formal worship was undoubtedly least popular in these areas. Misunderstanding has in addition surrounded the restricted and pejorative imputation of "respectability." There exists a clear tendency among historians of the working class to confine respectability, or the hankering after it, to a small upper section of the lower strata whose life style was directed more towards that of the lower middle class. It is suggested that religion and church-going were more correctly features of this culture, rather than that of the main proletarian body. This, to be sure, was one strategy for the social climber, but there is a sense in which respectability was wider than suggested here, and may indeed be seen as one response to the very conditions of working class life. It ought also to embrace "self-respect" and comprehend the struggles of many ordinary people to remain afloat with some measure of dignity in a hostile world. In the anonymity of the late nineteenth century urban environment, a number of the working population perhaps sought actively to confront the forces bearing upon their lives by establishing for themselves an aim in life and sense of purpose, by maintaining a stable home and family in the face of disintegrative forces, by escaping the drunkenness and fecklessness of the "rough" family, and above all by ascribing to some vague standards of "decency" and self-respect. Such working men and women might seek to bring a feeling of

²⁵ N.W. JOHNSON, *Willie Pick*, (Welwyn, 1973) pp. 7-9.

²⁶ A.J. TAYLOR, "Concentration and Specialisation in the Lancashire Cotton Industry, 1825-1850," in *Economic History Review*, second series, Vol. I, (1949) pp. 114-116.

²⁷ An account of the success of Methodism in the Rossendale valley may be found in W. JESSOP, *An Account of Methodism in Rossendale and its Neighbourhood*, (1881), cited by K.S. INGLIS, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, (London, 1964) pp. 10-11.

order into their lives and a small measure of autonomous control in the midst of seeming anarchy. They would certainly not be the poorest sections, whose passivity is generally recognised, or the rough working class. But they would not simply be confined to the better paid, upper sections of the work force; it was precisely for those who had just enough to escape the hand to mouth existence of the bread line — but precious little else — that self-respect became imperative. Too frequently the working class is pictured as passive and inert, the victim of, and unable to transcend social forces and ideological pressures. On the contrary, a large number of workers perhaps sought after “respectability” as in some small way surmounting factors seemingly beyond their control, and establishing social distance between themselves and those who had capitulated to such forces. There existed a number of stratagems by which one’s integrity might be maintained. Religious ideals were one possible form of higher focus and coherence, something above the squalid daily struggle.²⁸ We should not be surprised that socialism held out a similar attraction to these working men and their wives.

If we turn to examine religious institutions and sentiment within the social life of the working class, it becomes immediately obvious that a broader and more flexible approach is necessary. Ideas, beliefs and practices of a basically religious nature seem more widespread than often thought, and intimately related to working class conditions of life. In like fashion, although working men felt hostile to what they saw as the wheeling-dealing and nepotism of the churches and their representatives, we would be wrong in assuming that this was an indication of irreligion or that the churches had but little or no impact upon working class lives. The influence of the chapel in Lancashire communities was often extensive. It became in places a genuine focus of social life, an economic, political, educational and recreational, as well as religious institution. It is our contention here then that the treatment of working class religious life needs to be considerably widened and socially located within working class cultures as a whole.

III

The strength of Nonconformity in Lancashire cannot be divorced from the specific religious history of the county. Observers were well aware of the vigorous religious traditions to be found in the northwest,²⁹

²⁸ The ideas presented in this paragraph must be seen as tentative proposals for future research. The evidence here is largely qualitative, and stems from a number of interviews I have conducted among elderly working men and women on the place of religion in working class life. I hope to elaborate upon the role played by religion in maintaining working class self-respect in a future article. It may be noticed, however, that working class “respectability” might have been enhanced in other ways too; S.G. Checkland has shown how, even among working men of quite humble station, a sense of dignity and confidence might flow from the possession of some form of pre-industrial skill for which there was still social demand: see his *The Rise of Industrial Society in England, 1815-1885*, (London, 1964) p. 237.

²⁹ R. HALLEY, *Lancashire, Its Puritanism and Nonconformity*, (Manchester, 1872) p.v.

More distinctly than any other English county Lancashire has a religious history of its own. Its Puritanism has been remarkable for many peculiarities, its Nonconformism has been, in many respect unlike the Nonconformism of other parts of England.

By the late eighteenth century centres such as Manchester, Liverpool, Bolton ("the Geneva of Lancashire"), Blackburn and Lancaster "were the sources from which evangelical Nonconformity were diffused through all parts of the county³⁰", and many of these chapels made significant contributions to Lancashire civic and cultural life. In 1843 Edward Baines Jr. reported that in Lancashire there existed church and chapel accommodation for 42% of her population, compared to about 30% in London.³¹ By the middle decades of the nineteenth Manchester had emerged, of course, as the home of bourgeois Nonconformity, but it is as well to remember that the religious census had shown Nonconformity, and in particular the Wesleyan Methodists, to be most influential in the popular religious life of the manufacturing districts.³²

It is further beyond question that the Sunday school movement in Lancashire was significant in touching at a number of points the lives of working people. "The system originated by Mr. Raikes some seventy years ago," noted Reach in his reports,³³

...took deep root in Lancashire, and grew with the growth of manufacturing industry. The serious cast of the Lancashire mind, and its earnestness and zeal, acting upon the facilities afforded by the order and discipline which it is the very nature of the factory system to instill, formed a soil in which the Sunday school system took very deep root and bore very rich harvests.

In his *History of Lancashire* Baines observed that no less than 7,200 scholars attended the various denominational Sunday schools in Bolton in 1824. In the 1830s there existed in Manchester and Salford some 34 Anglican, 72 dissenting, and 11 Catholic schools,³⁴ and by 1849 Reach estimated that in Manchester alone there might be found from 40,000 to 50,000 Sunday school scholars, and from 4,000 to 5,000 teachers, inspectors and visitants. In the report cited above, Baines Jr. found one Sunday school pupil for every five inhabitants in Lancashire, as against one in ten in London. Much of the initiative behind the Sunday schools was due to the Methodists, who made extensive efforts to reach a section of the population for whom educational provision had hitherto been negligible. Usually managed by ordinary mill workers, Methodist schools in some places exceeded the total provision of all the other denominations.³⁵ In 1857 it was estimated that of 2,790 people in Haslingden, almost one in three attended Sunday schools, admittedly "a greater number in propor-

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 526.

³¹ E. BAINES, *The Social, Educational and Religious State of the Manufacturing Districts*, (London, 1969) p. 18.

³² INGLIS, "Patterns of Religious Worship," pp. 85-86.

³³ REACH, *Manchester and the Textile Districts*, pp. 43-44.

³⁴ A.P. WADSWORTH, "The First Manchester Sunday Schools," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, XXXIII, (1951): p. 326.

³⁵ H.F. MATHEWS, *Methodism and the Education of the People*, (London, 1949) pp. 47-51.

tion to the population than any place in Lancashire", but indicative of their strength in northern popular life.³⁶ The habit of Sunday school attendance, at least among children, remained a marked feature of working class life to the end of the century, as T.W. Pateman's account of "Dunshaw" — an industrial town in northeast Lancashire — makes clear.³⁷ There was a wide measure of agreement among working class parents that it was a good thing for their children to attend these schools. It ensured a couple of hours rest on what would, in all likelihood, be their only free day, but many genuinely saw in the Sunday schools a little education and training, and possibly a better future for their sons and daughters. It is in their attitude towards the Sunday schools that the working population, as Henry Pelling has suggested, most clearly displayed their religious tolerance.³⁸

To progress beyond impressions of accommodation and attendance, we need to situate religion within the wider framework of working class life. It is true that traditional, ritualistic, or even frankly superstitious practices survived in some working class communities, especially in the more remote areas. The revivalist meeting would periodically arrive in Lancashire towns and villages, and claim its converts; one woman recalls the soteriological "love-feasts" common in her childhood towards the end of the century.³⁹ But religion could not but be in the main severely practical, and took on forms among working people deeply rooted in their conditions of life and expressing dominant patterns of social relationships. Questions of abstract theology or doctrinal disputation were irrelevant, for as Alice Foley of Bolton remembered,⁴⁰

...everyday life in the home, school and in the streets healthily conspired against such a conception of religiosity. The force of environment and nurture gradually decreed that contentment and fulfillment would be found, if at all, in kinship with the lowly and simple of this world...

Religious beliefs had to earn their stay by confronting the most pressing problems of working class life. There was offered in the last analysis something better than the present round; stemming from a life's toil but sparsely rewarded on this earth, working men commonly expressed a belief in "heaven", in a life after death and future salvation. Many believed in a Supreme Being, whose judgement, while it might seem a little perverse at present, would prevail in the end — a final arbiter of "eternal

³⁶ C. ASPIN, *Lancashire, The First Industrial Society*, (Helmshore, 1969) p. 109.

³⁷ T.W. PATEMAN, *Dunshaw: A Lancashire Background*, (London, 1948) pp. 168-170.

³⁸ "Popular Attitudes to Religion," in *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*, (London, 1968) pp. 30-31.

³⁹ A description of the "love-feast" is to be found in G. MITCHELL, ed., *The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell*, (London, 1968) pp. 59-60; for a description of the revivalist meeting, see PATEMAN, *Dunshaw*, p. 173; for other traditional working class practices, see further A. SMITH, "Popular Religion," *Past and Present*, XL, (1969): 181-186.

⁴⁰ A. FOLEY, *A Bolton Childhood*, (Manchester, 1973) p. 36.

justice.”⁴¹ Above all, in an age when the working class had by necessity to turn inwards for relief, to that mutuality and self-help basic to their communities, religious beliefs tended to mirror these social patterns. And thus the “Christian” thing to do was to offer help and support in times of crisis to one’s friends, workmates, neighbours, and especially to one’s family. Such patterns of reciprocity were socially located and would therefore exclude those who, for one reason or another, were deemed as outside the community. Religious patterns equally, then, cannot be divorced from the internal differentiation within the working population; status divisions were frequently reflected in chapel attendance, and some Irish Catholic communities rarely found themselves the recipients of such charitable concern.⁴²

Although possibly lacking in coherence and ill-defined, working class religion revolved around certain core themes, simple, but intensely held values comprising a loose system of morality and ethics. Religion was not something for Sundays alone, and forgotten during the rest of the week, but primarily for the working class a practical guide to “right” and “wrong” in life. A basic commitment to love, brotherhood, charity, justice and attendant notions were grounded firmly in daily life. The social equivalents of these ideals lay in living a “decent” life, in being a “good” neighbour to others when in trouble; it meant “sticking together” and lending a hand in the face of life’s many crises in particular to one’s kin. That a whole philosophy of life might be reduced to a working maxim makes such sentiments no less significant. Hannah Mitchell’s father was a religious man, and she recalled that, “He considered that the whole duty of man was contained in the Golden Rule, ‘Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you’, and he certainly lived up to this belief.”⁴³ The focus of working class religion might, in this sense, be narrow and inward looking, located within and reflecting the parochial social outlook and practices of the community.

What working men and women took to be genuinely religious was in essence practical. These beliefs and practices helped people bear the tragedies and setbacks endemic in their lives, and prayer was often a

⁴¹ On this aspect of popular religion, see further “The Journeyman Engineer,” (Thomas Wright), *Our New Masters*, (London, 1873) p. 88. Wright notes of the working class that “They do ‘profess hope hereafter’ — the hope of a brighter, better, juster, more all-equal hereafter, by which they cannot but be gainers, as those who have not had their good things in this life will get them there.” This salvationist aspect of lower class religion has been broadly substantiated by sociologists of religion; for instance, Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, (London, 1971), p. 106, notes that “...the sense of honour of disprivileged classes rests on some concealed promise for the future... What they cannot claim to be, they replace by the worth of that which they will one day become...”

⁴² Social differentiation within the working class has been emphasised by ROBERTS, *The Classic Slum*, for instance, p. 14 on status and religion, and pp. 22-23 on the position of the Irish. Further insight into the position of Irish Catholics in working class communities may be gained from M. McCARTHY, *Generation in Revolt*, (London, 1953) pp. 21-26; Margaret McCarthy suffered social ostracism by marrying a Catholic.

⁴³ *The Hard Way Up*, p. 55; on this point see further, T. Wright, *The Great Unwashed*, (London, 1868) p. 83.

comforter in the face of death and disaster. Such sentiments were practical in that they faced up to real problems, but also in that they tended to be pragmatic and antithetical to theological subtleties, and often non-denominational. It was not unusual for members of the same family to belong, or at least express attachment, to chapels of differing persuasions, or attend a Nonconformist chapel themselves, while their children might go to the local Church Sunday school. It mattered more that they found a congenial atmosphere there, rather than this or that interpretation of the scriptures, and with this in mind they might express a deep attachment to the local chapel while rarely in actual fact attending formal religious worship.⁴⁴ Well might one working class woman recall her mother's spiritual predilections as "creedless and pewless".⁴⁵ Expressed religious opinions tended to be not simply dogmatic, but also fluid, and often varied depending upon the social context in which it was offered.⁴⁶ Religion for the working class in addition sanctified the special occasions in life. It was almost unthinkable that christenings, weddings and burials should not be done "properly", that is to say given a religious seal, and this would be the case for even the hitherto laxest attender. Religion overall lent a sense of meaning to working class, and brought the world somewhat more within one's grasp and comprehension.

Most working people were convinced that life ought to conform to certain basic ethical maxims. These rarely found coherent or systematic articulation, or comprised a rounded philosophy of life and after-life, but were flexible precepts which by their very nature could not be confined to the "religious" sphere alone. If the working class conceived the spirit of religion as implying certain social obligations and relationships, these might easily inform and merge with wider economic or political beliefs. In those parts of the country where Nonconformity had gained a foothold among the labouring population, we can see how religion has frequently impinged upon political ideals. George Edwards of the Norfolk farm labourers, for instance, wrote in his autobiography of how Primitive Methodism opened his eyes to social injustices, and in consequence, the need for socialism: "With my study of theology, I soon began to realise that the social conditions of the people were not as God intended they should be."⁴⁷ Again, Margaret McCarthy from Lancashire, an activist in the early years of the labour movement, has recalled how the growth of her father's socialist beliefs and sense of class solidarity could not be divorced from his equally heartfelt Methodism.⁴⁸ That political consciousness might

⁴⁴ A number of autobiographies I have examined show clearly how working men changed their place of worship for other than solely religious reasons, for instance, Moses HEAP, *My Life and Times, 1824-1913* (typescript in the Central Reference Library, Manchester). On this question, see further M. LOANE, *The Queen's Poor*, (London, 1905) p. 35; PELLING, "Popular Attitudes to Religion," pp. 22-23.

⁴⁵ FOLEY, *Bolton Childhood*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ For this aspect of working class religiosity see McLEOD, *Class and Religion*, p. 55.

⁴⁷ *From Crow-Scaring to Westminster*, (London, 1922) cited by D.M. THOMPSON, *Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 198.

⁴⁸ *Generation in Revolt*, p. 13.

emerge, in part at least, as an extension of religious beliefs, can be located precisely in this flexibility of popular religion. The Rev. Conrad Noel, writing of religion and British socialism in 1911, pointed to the intimate relationship between the socialist appeal and what he termed the "lukewarm theism" of the working class. "English democrats do not think out what they mean by authority, and therefore the idea of the Heavenly Authority cannot clash with their loose and unfinished earthly schemes: their political vagueness fits in well enough with a lukewarm theism."⁴⁹ and it should be no surprise, as we shall see, that the precise nature of socialist ideals owed much to these antecedent religious conditions.

At the other extreme, working class religion might lapse into utopianism and certainly had its sentimental side. We can trace a vision of fellowship, or a longing for a better and more harmonious social order in their beliefs, which has often inspired working class politicians and socialist rhetoric. But if the New Jerusalem was a vision, the ultimate test remained practical. For everyday activity, "practising" and not simply "preaching" was the hallmark of the good Christian. Inherent in working class religion, therefore, was an in-built suspicion of the established denominations, and a mistrust of clergymen and ministers who preached Christian virtues and yet seemed more often than not concerned with ministering to the needs of the rich, siding with the masters, or frowning upon the rough working clothes in their chapel pews. It became a common socialist complaint that the churches were failing by the very standards of their own message, and yet, as *The Journeyman Engineer* noted, working men nevertheless clung tenaciously onto and counterposed what they believed to be genuinely religious.⁵⁰

Uneducated though they may be, ignorant of theology as they mostly are, their common sense still tells them that to make church-going the be-all and end-all, as a test of religion, is to confound religion with the observance of one of its mere mechanical rites; to put a premium upon hypocrisy and cheap self-righteousness... In the essentials of Christianity — the feelings of brotherly love and kindness, the virtue of patience — the working classes are not lacking. Their non-attendance at places of worship has not the grave meaning that even many of the more charitably inclined in the other classes may attach to it...

How widespread were such religious conceptions? It seems clear that active, principled secularism was rare,⁵¹ although the poorest sections and the rough working class would have little to do with religion.⁵² At

⁴⁹ "The Working Class," in W.K. Lowther Clark, ed., *Facing the Facts, or An Englishman's Religion*, (London, 1911) p. 94.

⁵⁰ *Our New Masters*, pp. 87-89.

⁵¹ George Haw perhaps overstated the case when he noted that, "The aggressive agnostic belongs more to the middle class than to the working class, in *Christianity and the Working Classes*, (London, 1906) p. 1. In fact, the secularist issue could frequently arouse considerable, if temporary, interest among the working class; see Pateman, *Dunshaw*, pp. 175-179. Nevertheless, secularism was but a weak trend within the working class movement as a whole, and gave way before the growth of socialism, see E. ROYLE, *Radical Politics, 1790-1900: Religion and Unbelief*, (London, 1971) p. 78.

⁵² A fascinating account of "rough" working class Sunday life is to be found in W. TOMLINSON, *Bye-Ways of Manchester Life*, (London, 1880) where he describes the drunken orgies at the "The Sunday Saturnalia at Northenden."

the other extreme, we can certainly find evidence of working class religiosity which may be more correctly located within a labour aristocratic culture.⁵³ Again, a small number conceived religion primarily as an intense and deeply personal relationship with their God. Such faith would usually inform the whole life style of the "devout" working man, which was apt to be puritanical and censorious.⁵⁴ Standing between these extremes was a large section of the working class, for whom religion brought a measure of hope, order and self-respect. It was, quite simply, part of their way of life, not devout or theological religion, but a working ethical code by which life might be lived and ultimately judged. If such religion caused some to distance themselves from the established churches, this cannot be taken to indicate that they lacked entirely any sense of identity. The chapel was often approached as an all-round social institution, and in this sense its influence might be pronounced. Again, we need to widen our conception of the role of religious institutions in working class life.

IV

Methodist, Baptist and other Nonconformist chapels in Lancashire were frequently vital parts of the community, and offered a variety of attractions on a number of levels. In many of the larger towns too, we should not deprecate their contribution to working class life. As has often been noted, Nonconformity was frequently more democratic in its organisation than, say, the Anglican church; it offered greater participation, through lay involvement of various kinds, for ordinary people in the day to day running of their chapels, and an increased sense of control over their own religious lives.⁵⁵

In the most general sense, the place of chapels in the social life of working class communities may be grasped from the manner in which activities tended to revolve around the various seasons of the religious calendar. Margret Penn's engaging account of life in Moss Ferry, near Manchester, shows clearly how the pattern of events in this industrial village focused upon the events of the church year.⁵⁶ Christmas, for instance, was the sparkling climax of the northern year, and was celebrated with parties and festivities in the chapel. The local gathering of families for the traditional New Year party held in the chapel hall, was similarly popular in other communities. Easter was marked by the "daffodil services," long awaited festivities which symbolised the passing of winter, and were again accompanied by social activities. Those commentators who have stressed the marked absence of religious sentiment among them, cannot account

⁵³ The life of J.R. Lancashire would fall into this category; see F. HALL, *A Northern Pioneer: The Life of J.R. Lancashire*, (London, 1927).

⁵⁴ For an engaging account of devout working class behaviour, see J.B. GOODMAN, ed., *Victorian Cabinet Maker: Memoirs of James Hopkinson, 1819-1894*, (London, 1968).

⁵⁵ This aspect of Nonconformity was stressed by J.L. and B. HAMMOND, *The Town Labourer*, (London, 1919) pp. 270-71; see further, WRIGHT, *The Great Unwashed*, p. 93; Noel, "The Working Classes," pp. 107-10; THOMPSON, *Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 161.

⁵⁶ *Manchester 14 Miles*, (Cambridge, 1947) pp. 64-80, 95.

for the rich fascination which religious ceremonies, processions and anniversaries held out for the working class. The Whitsun Walks to this day remain a colourful aspect of Lancashire popular culture, and in the nineteenth century were eagerly anticipated, and entailed much prior preparation. Moses Heap, a weaver from Rawtenstall, remembered of the earlier part of the century that,⁵⁷

Whit Friday was our 'Red Letter Day'. The day was spent by the scholars in procession through the village streets, accompanied by two bands of music, and banners of various shapes, sizes and designs, visiting the gentry on our way, and receiving presents in the shape of oranges, sweets and cakes.

These occasions retained their obvious appeal, and accounts of Lancashire life from late century suggest that the Whitsun Walks were as popular as ever. Joe Toole, who was brought up in the grimy streets of Salford, recounts how even in this large urban town poor families formed saving clubs to buy new clothes in order to "walk with pride in the Whit-week religious processions."⁵⁸ The annual chapel sermons were, in like fashion, popular attractions, and it was customary for Lancashire folk to "do the rounds" of the local chapel services at this time in the year.

Along with weddings, christenings and burials, these occasions often turned into real neighbourhood events, and their significance rested in the fact that they were at once *religious* and *social*. Many of the working population looked forward to such occasions with excitement, for they were real landmarks in the year, affording the opportunity not only of religious expression, but also for demonstrations of collective sentiment and social relationships basic to community life. It is significant that a number of working men and women only attended formal worship at their chapel on just such occasions during the course of the whole year;⁵⁹ a religious emphasis nevertheless seemed fitting in marking these significant annual dates.

Throughout Lancashire in this period, and this is especially true of the smaller towns and industrial villages of the county, the leisure and social patterns of the local community would often focus upon the chapel, for here was one institution within which members might make and control their activities. Teas, parties, field days and outings were provided for the children, dances and other social functions for the adults. In later life, a number of working men have fondly recalled the trips and outings organised by the chapel or Sunday school which provided a welcome break from the monotony of daily routine, and it was in the chapel choir, or the Lads' Brigade, or the Sunday school cricket team, that many remember

⁵⁷ *My Life and Times*, p. 6.

⁵⁸ *Fighting Thro' Life*, (London, 1935) p. 8. It should be noted that the Whitsun Walks were celebrated with equal fervour by Anglicans and Catholics and not simply the Nonconformists, and in this way these denominations too might become popular foci.

⁵⁹ See "The Diary of John Ward of Clitheroe, Weaver, 1860-64," *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, CV, (1954) p. 161 *et. seq.* In the years covered by the diary, John Ward mentions going to church only on the occasions of his daughter's wedding, and on Palm Sunday 1862.

the happiest times of their youth.⁶⁰ The Band of Hope movement flourished in Lancashire and enrolled countless working class children.⁶¹ Though its aims were peculiarly censorious — the Bands aimed to instil in working class youth the twin virtues of teetotalism and bourgeois respectability — they provided recreation and diversion, the memory of which far outlasted their moral sermonisings. Adults, too, found in their chapel a community of like-minded people with whom problems might be aired, and points of concern discussed. Chapels were centres of support and assistance; men and women felt that they could turn with confidence to their fellow members for help, both material and moral, in times of need. We have evidence to suggest that some Nonconformist chapels in addition acted as a savings bank where working people might save for the annual wakes week holiday and other special occasions, or to safeguard against emergencies.⁶² They provided too an opportunity for working people to enjoy making or listening to music.⁶³ One is reminded of Jack Lawson's description of the working class chapel, and its role in the community,⁶⁴

The chapel was their first social centre. Here it was they drew together, found strength in their weakness and expressed to each other their hidden thoughts and needs. The chapel gave them their first music, their first literature and philosophy to meet the harsh life and cruel impact of the materialistic age. Here these men formed the language and art to express their antagonisms to grim conditions and injustices.

Religion frequently set the seal upon family socials and gatherings, and a visit to the chapel would be an accepted part of the occasion.⁶⁵ As social institutions in this sense, the chapels faced, in the larger towns and conurbations of south Lancashire, the competing pull of the public house, theatre and music hall, and the two cultures remained on the whole distinct. But for some the chapel retained its appeal as a centre of wholesome conviviality, a "cut above" the pub culture, and it is not without significance that working people who moved into the large towns from the surrounding districts would turn before all else to the chapel for friendship and assistance in their new environment.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ An example from Yorkshire, where in many respects popular religious life was similar to Lancashire, may be found in the autobiography of the trade unionist Ben TURNER, *About Myself*, (London, 1930) p. 40.

⁶¹ Lilian Lewis SHIMAN, "The Band of Hope Movement: Respectable Recreation for Working Class Children," *Victorian Studies*, XVII, (1973): 49-74.

⁶² A descriptive volume published by the cotton industry, *Industrial Lancashire* (n.d.), mentions the role of chapels as savings banks in Oldham: see further, JOHNSON, *Willie Pick*, p. 27, for mention of a "Penny Bank" organised by the Church Sunday school.

⁶³ Joseph Burgess's love of music and poetry stemmed from his mother, who sang as leading soprano, although she knew no formal music, at the Hollinswood Primitive Methodist chapel: see J. BURGESS, *A Potential Poet?: His Autobiography and Verse*, (Ilford, 1927) p. 9.

⁶⁴ *A Man's Life*, (London, 1944) p. 69. Jack Lawson is describing the north east of England in this passage.

⁶⁵ C. Stella DAVIES, *North Country Bred: A Working Class Family Chronicle*, (London, 1963) p. 68.

⁶⁶ MITCHELL, *The Hard Way Up*, pp. 73-82; when Hannah Mitchell moved to Bolton, she turned immediately to her chapel for new companionship.

For many of the working population, and especially those who in the eighties and nineties were the first converts to and cadres of the evolving socialist movement, religion was a formative educational and cultural experience, the Sunday schools possibly their most important formal training, and this remained in part at least the case for many years even after the provision of full time formal education in 1870.⁶⁷ Many had picked up a little learning from their chapel or Sunday school, where lessons, stories and anecdotes were frequently imprinted upon impressionable young minds, ethics and recitations imbibed which might be recalled in later life. Some adults learned to read or write spurred on, perhaps, by lay involvement in the chapel; a number, certainly, had been taught to read from the Bible, their first groping enquiries directed by the reading material most conveniently to hand in an age when books were beyond the limited means of most men and women.⁶⁸ In many homes before the availability and use of public libraries became widespread among the working class, only religious books and pamphlets, often awarded as Sunday school prizes,⁶⁹ would be possessed by the family. The family Bible — it was often known simply as “The Book” — might be a treasured possession, and would be handed down through the generations. In some working class homes, family Bible readings on Sundays were as much an institution as the family prayers of the upper middle class household.⁷⁰ Education was variously encouraged in other ways too. Some chapels founded, or made space available, for mutual improvement societies, in which a sense of collective self-education might flourish. Evidence exists to suggest that others occasionally organised speaking and elocution lessons, and as the century progressed, we learn of working men and women pressing to have social and political questions treated in their chapels, and discussion groups set up to thrash out issues of topical concern.⁷¹ It should be of little surprise to note then, that numerous socialist groups in Lancashire during this period were based, or held their meetings and discussions, in the local chapel hall or Sunday school. Finally, the chapel might sometimes be an outlet for such cultural expression as acting, sing-

⁶⁷ F. SMITH, *History of English Elementary Education*, (London, 1931) cited by M.D. SHIPMAN, *Childhood: A Sociological Perspective*, (Windsor, 1972) p. 15, has shown that Sunday schooling remained more important than full-time schooling until well into the nineteenth century. In late century, Nonconformist Sunday schooling must, however, be set against the predominance of Church Board schools in Lancashire; there can be no doubt that this latter was an important influence upon the Lancashire working class; see *The Times*, 25 December 1891.

⁶⁸ See for instance, *The Autobiography of Thomas Wood, 1820-1880*, part of which is to be found in J. BURNETT, *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s*, (London, 1974) p. 305; Jack Lawson has recalled the influence of the family Bible, which dated back to 1731, upon his reading; see *A Man's Life*, pp. 12, 49.

⁶⁹ PENN, *Manchester 14 Miles*, pp. 188-89; ROBERTS, *The Classic Slum*, p. 170.

⁷⁰ MITCHELL, *The Hard Way Up*, p. 50.

⁷¹ PENN, *Manchester 14 Miles*, pp. 74-80, for mention of the mutual improvement society; B. WEBB, *My Apprenticeship*, (London, 1971) p. 174 on the growing desire for social and political discussion in Lancashire Nonconformist chapels.

ing, dancing and poetry readings, providing working people with opportunities starkly absent from their day to day routine.⁷²

It may perhaps now be more clearly appreciated how much wider might be the influence of the Nonconformist chapel in working class life than can be simply adduced from Sunday attendance. Above all, the enormous impact of hymns, prayers and sermons, and the personal influence and charisma of the minister on working people, cannot be overstated.⁷³ Before the advent of mass channels of communication, religious pronouncements of this nature were the most significant means by which a specific and consistent philosophy of the world reached them. As J.C. Lowe has recently suggested, in a discussion of the impact of the 1867 Reform Act in Lancashire, there is less force behind the common objection that the churches had little or no impact upon the working class in Lancashire than might be the case elsewhere. The strong sense of community which existed in many towns "could well induce a larger number of people than would subscribe to positive religious attitudes to identify themselves with an issue that was of local prominence."⁷⁴ If the working population did not seem outwardly religious, it must be recalled that their allegiance to the chapel might be no less strong than was the case with those who were church-goers in the accepted sense.

It was in this fashion that many Nonconformist chapels became social institutions in the life of the working class, offering involvement and participation in a variety of ways other than that of formal religious worship; in this precisely lay the attraction of the Nonconformist denominations to ordinary people, for they allowed them some scope in the running and control of their own religious affairs. On a personal level, it was an institution through which might be realised working class self-control and expression, imbuing the life of the participant with a sense of meaning. The chapels in these communities had, in addition, a wider social role. In her fascinating account of northern working class life, C. Stella Davies has recalled how the strong sense of familial responsibility and cohesion, solidarity and mutual self-help basic to their lives, extended to embrace members of the local chapel.⁷⁵ An atmosphere of genuine *camaraderie* grew up in some chapels, to which men and women felt understandably

⁷² A. KENNEY, *Memoirs of a Militant*, (London, 1924) p. 9, has left a description of the opportunities which the chapel provided for song and dance in the Lancashire village of Springhead; JOHNSON, *Willie Pick*, pp. 29-32, for a description of working class involvement in theatricals in the Anglican Sunday school and Church. It is of some significance that the Labour Church movement of the 1890s sought to involve working people by placing great stress upon social and cultural events, replicating to some extent the patterns of the working class chapel.

⁷³ For an example of the influence of the minister upon working families, see PENN, *Manchester 14 Miles*, pp. 190-93.

⁷⁴ J.C. LOWE, "The Tory Triumph in Blackburn and in Lancashire," *The Historical Journal*, XVI, (1973) p. 742. Local preachers might have considerable influence in the working class community in general, and not simply among the chapel goers; many were working men themselves, and often firmly of the community; see the example of the extempore preaching given by PATEMAN, *Dunshaw*, p. 170.

⁷⁵ *North Country Bred*, p. 36.

attracted. As a focus of the community, chapel life reflected its social patterns, the solidarity and status divisions contained within it, and served to define the boundaries of that community. The various levels of chapel life ultimately suggest a single "way of life." Noting its prevalence in Lancashire, Robert Halley observed in 1872 how Congregationalism,⁷⁶

...having little of the stiffness or formality of the Independency prevalent in the southern and eastern counties, has accomodated its working with remarkable facility to the feelings and habits of the manufacturing population... and with as little interference as possible allow them to do, what cotton spinners male and female love to do — to manage their religious concerns in their own way.

This sense of self-determination which chapel life afforded combined, as Beatrice Webb noted of Nonconformity in Bacup in 1883, personal and social autonomy, self-respect and communal spirit,⁷⁷

Each chapel, even of the same denomination, manages its own affairs; and there are monthly meetings of all the members (male and female) to discuss questions of expenditure etc. In fact, each chapel is a self-governing community, regulating not only chapel matters but overlooking the private life of its members.

We should hardly expect the forms of socialism that emerged among these people to be divorced from this way of life.

V

The development of British socialism in the 1880s and last decade of the century saw the political centre of gravity shift from London, where it had been established by the Social Democratic Federation and the Fabians in the eighties, to the industrial heart of England. A variety of local labour unions and socialist bodies had emerged in the provinces; they had tentatively united into the Independent Labour Party in 1893, and, allying with the trade unions to form the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, had laid the foundations for the birth of a national Labour Party in 1906. Lancashire was well to the forefront of this resurgence of socialist enthusiasm.

Tom Mann reported, as General Secretary to the National Administrative Council of the I.L.P. in 1894, that their strength was rooted firmly in Lancashire and Yorkshire.⁷⁸ The 120 delegates who attended the founding conference of the I.L.P. in 1893 in Bradford had been drawn

⁷⁶ HALLEY, *Lancashire*, p. 533.

⁷⁷ WEBB, *My Apprenticeship*, pp. 174-75. It should be noted in concluding section IV that a number of commentators have professed to discern in some of the aspects of popular religion outlined in this and the previous section, symptoms of religious indifference and possible decline; see, for example, J. KENT, "Feelings and Festivals: An Interpretation of some Working Class Religious Attitudes," in H.J. DYOS and M. WOLFF, eds., *The Victorian City* (London, 1973) II, pp. 855-871.

⁷⁸ I.L.P. General Secretary's Monthly Report, National Administrative Council Minutes, March, 1894. On the early history and geographical strength of the I.L.P., see further R.E. Dowse, *Left in the Centre: The Independant Labour Party, 1893-1940*, (London, 1966) pp. 8-9; P.P. POIRIER, *The Advent of the Labour Party*, (London, 1958) pp. 48-50; PELLING, *Origins of the Labour Party*, pp. 158-60.

overwhelmingly from the industrial north of England, and Scotland, and two years later the I.L.P. had fielded 28 candidates in the general election, of whom 7 contested seats in Lancashire, 8 in Yorkshire, and 7 in Scotland. Recent research has confirmed that there was no manifest change in this geographical distribution of strength between 1893 and 1910, and of the 29 successful L.R.C. candidates in 1906, fully 13 represented Lancashire constituencies.⁷⁹ I.L.P. branches were by no means the only hives of socialist activity in this period; Labour Churches sprang up in about 30 towns in Lancashire during the course of the nineties, and often associated with, or offshoots of Labour Church congregations, socialist Sunday schools were formed by working men and women throughout the county.⁸⁰ Along with the Trades Council and the Labour Electoral Association, these bodies had been united in May 1892, into a Manchester District I.L.P. by the initiative of Robert Blatchford, a brilliant and popular journalist who had given up a lucrative post on *The Sunday Chronicle* to found *The Clarion* socialist newspaper in Manchester in late 1891. Through the columns of the bright weekly *Clarion*, and his popular exposition of socialism, *Merrie England*, Blatchford had built up a devoted local following in Lancashire, and the proliferation of *Clarion* associations — “Cinderella Clubs” for poor children, *Clarion* choirs and bands, scouts, glee clubs, *Clarion* cycling clubs — had seized the imagination and channelled the activities of countless working people. An emerging socialist awareness embodied in the demand for independent labour representation had caught on in a big way in the industrial north.

Historians have pointed out that the social composition of the socialist bodies in the north showed a clear preponderance of lower middle class, and especially skilled manual workers.⁸¹ While this is so, it needs to be continually restated that the appeal of socialism was by no means confined to a labour aristocracy pure and simple, as J.R. Clynes’ recollection of the early socialists perhaps demonstrates,⁸²

...the fact is that most Labour supporters and speakers were illiterate youngsters who had left school at 10 or 12 years old; whose parents could not read or write... Collarless, moneyless, almost wordless, we earnestly believed that it was wrong for the ill-educated to the exploited.

The various socialist organisations were united by a common vision and hope which, at the local level, transcended whatever differences may have existed among them. There was, in the first place, a wide overlap of membership; I.L.P.’ers were sometimes also *Clarionettes*, and vice versa, would almost certainly be Labour Church-goers, and their children at least would be sent to the socialist Sunday school, if one existed lo-

⁷⁹ D. HOPKIN, “The Membership of the I.L.P., 1904-1910: A Spatial and Occupational Analysis,” *International Review of Social History*, XX, (1975): 175-97; PELLING and BEALEY, *Labour and Politics*, pp. 279, 290-92.

⁸⁰ D.F. SUMMERS, “The Labour Church and Allied Movements” (Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Univ. of Edinburgh, 1958), pp. 312-13; F. REID, “Socialist Sunday Schools in Britain, 1892-1939,” *International Review of Social History*, XI, (1966): 18-47.

⁸¹ HOPKIN, “Membership of the I.L.P.,” p. 192; PIERSON, *Marxism*, pp. 209-10.

⁸² *Memoirs, 1869-1924*, (London, 1937) pp. 59-60.

cally. Their common socialist agitation during the nineties was distinctly local, not to say parochial, and directed towards the rectification of immediate concerns. The I.L.P. made its greatest gains during this period in municipal elections, or as representatives on the Poor Law Boards of Guardians, or on the School Boards. Socialists drew together around demands for immediate legislative intervention, the municipilisation of land, liquor, food or milk supplies; their propaganda techniques were open-air meetings and discussions, electioneering and local newsheets. There were differences of opinion and tactics among the socialists at this time, most notably between the I.L.P., which could be rather puritan, and the *Clairion* activists, who were more often carefree and jolly in their approach. But above all else an ethical vision united these men and women; a vision born of, and yet challenging their grey environment, fired by their reading of Ruskin and Carlyle, William Morris, Carpenter and Henry George, and nurtured by their Nonconformity and chapel life, and the promise held out in *The Sermon on the Mount*. "It was an inspiration. It was like a revival gathering..." Philip Snowden has recalled of an early I.L.P. meeting, "...Socialism to these men and women was a new vision, a new hope of relief from the grinding toil and hard struggle with poverty which had been their daily lot."⁸³ It was a quest for "fellowship" and a fervent belief in a better future that caused Lancashire weavers, mill hands, miners and labourers to devote themselves to "The Cause" (for so it was known) of ethical socialism. It was the emergence of a very distinctive working class consciousness.

"Working class consciousness" demands careful treatment, for ideas must be socially located in the context of definite institutions and social relationships within which they emerge and crystallise. The beliefs of any working class group will emerge from the interaction of sentiments and experiences, the product of their daily life situation, and conceptions from "outside," directed more or less consciously at the working class. The interaction will be complex, and in consequence no ideology is absorbed wholesale, but will decompose in manifold ways to merge with those beliefs and practices indigenous to the working class situation. The process is often imperceptible, although in any social institution there may well be conflict in greater or lesser degree over the definition of the situation; this process is one of "cultural struggle." It seems clear that popular religious ideals emerged in large measure from just such a process. As a potentially efficacious means of social control, industrialists, magistrates, clergymen, and even such enlightened men as the Christian Socialists, and General Booth of the Salvation Army, turned to religion and the churches. Many local manufacturers in Lancashire provided Methodist and other Nonconformist chapels for their workforce, quick to sense the disciplining role these might perform; and this, to be sure, was the full implication of Andrew Ure's "moral machinery" brought up to date.⁸⁴ But to the extent that ordinary men and women had a measure of

⁸³ *An Autobiography*, (London, 1934) p. 67.

⁸⁴ DAVIES, *North Country Bred*, pp. 27-28, points out how many Lancashire manufacturers appreciated the role that Methodism might play in disciplining their workforce; on

control over their religious lives, as Nonconformity seems to have offered; and to the extent that chapels merged into working class life, as they did in some communities, then the reception and interpretation of their message manifested a subtle transformation, exhortations to quietism and deference twisted to fall more into line with working class perceptions. Expressed another way, we may perhaps say that the working class are not the hapless victims of "bourgeois ideology" sometimes portrayed, but will, through the institutions characteristic of their life such as some Nonconformist chapels and Sunday schools often were, formulate beliefs which are in greater harmony with their conceptions of social life. "In this way," has noted E.P. Thompson, "even the 'fortress' of the Sunday school might breed rebellion."⁸⁵

The nineteenth century affords numerous examples of changes wrought from below in the meanings attributed to religious belief systems. The Owenites held "socialist" Sunday services, and adopted hymns, readings, and even the pattern of the Christian year to their own ends. The Chartists founded their own churches in a number of places, and they, too, turned hymns and prayers to their own advantage.⁸⁶ Within the denominations, this struggle was no less apparent, for it was surely conflict over the control and organisation of their religion — exacerbated by a class division — that lay behind a number of the schisms in the Methodist church before mid-century.⁸⁷ We can interpret ethical socialism in like manner. Throughout Lancashire, the working class — young men and women in particular — were responding to the changing economic and social conditions of late century by challenging anew religious authority and relevance. To their demand that chapels and preachers both face the changing realities of working class life and respond to the challenge posed by the advancing socialist and democratic ideas some, like the Rev. W. Barnes of Nelson, expounded in his Methodist chapel upon the theme of "What Socialism can do for the People."⁸⁸

This is not to suggest, however, that the working population in the north were becoming irreligious, or that religion no longer held any meaning for them. Certainly, a number of working men came entirely to reject the religious beliefs they had once held, turning instead perhaps to the growing ethical or secularist bodies. For very many working people, chapel and religion were firm parts of their lives, and they sought to give religious idealism a new vitality and greater relevance. In this precisely lay the attraction of ethical socialism; for there those vague, yet deeply

Andrew Ure and the disciplining role of Methodism, see P. HOLLIS, ed., *Class and Class Conflict in Nineteenth Century England*, (London, 1973) pp. 342-345.

⁸⁵ *The Making of the English Working Class*, (London, 1968) p. 432; see further, WADSWORTH, "The Manchester Sunday Schools," p. 325.

⁸⁶ E. YEO, "Robert Owen and Radical Culture," in S. POLLARD and J. SALT, eds., *Robert Owen: Prophet of the Poor*, (London, 1971) pp. 97-103; H.U. FAULKNER, *Chartism and the Churches*, (New York, 1916).

⁸⁷ W.R. WARD, *Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850*, (London, 1972) pp. 135-76; see further THOMPSON, *Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 134-43.

⁸⁸ P. FIRTH, "Socialism and the Origins of the Labour Party in Nelson and District, 1890-1906" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Univ. of Manchester, 1975) p. 26.

felt, religious beliefs rooted in working class life might find renewed expression. The question is frequently posed as if the emerging socialist consciousness could not but be antithetical to its religious antecedents; most of the working class who turned in these years to socialism did not see the question in this light, but believed instead that the former might more forcefully express those beliefs they held as basic to the latter. To pose the question in this way is, we hope to suggest, to misconceive the nature of popular religion. Of course, this impulse behind the socialist consciousness itself gave rise to a number of forms. Only a few working men remained regular chapel-goers and coupled this with their political activities. Many more indeed distanced themselves from the established religions to which they might once have belonged, only to counter that "true" religion might best be practised outside the churches. Yet others attempted to forge religious structures which were more within their grasp and control, and they founded and worked through Labour Churches and socialist Sunday schools in seeking their "social" salvation. The unifying themes of this social consciousness were, in spite of such variation, precisely those sentiments fundamental to working class religion. These may be said to have underscored the various organisations and tendencies embraced by "The Cause."

It had been initially in their chapels that many Lancashire working men had learned their politics. "One cannot help feeling," wrote the young Beatrice Webb, "what an excellent thing these dissenting organisations have been for educating this class for self-government."⁸⁹ and as has often been noted, Nonconformity, and in particular the more democratic Methodist sects, such as the Primitive Methodists, were indeed breeding grounds for the political activists and trade unionists of the future.⁹⁰ Here men were schooled in the principles of self-government and co-operation, learnt the skills of organisation and developed techniques of public oratory. The labour movement has traditionally borrowed a variety of organisational forms from the religious bodies, and in this period we find the socialists in Lancashire adopting the fervent hymn singing of the Dissenters, as a morale booster as well as a means of socialist agitation and propaganda. Some working men, like Willie Pickerill of Stockport, arrived at socialism under the influence of radical and reforming ministers like Hugh Price Hughes, J. Scott Lidgett, Samuel Keeble, the Rev. F.L. Donaldson of Leicester ("The Friend of the Unemployed"), and local men like John Trevor and the Rev. B.J. Harker of Bolton.⁹¹ And then again, the more popular leaders of the socialist movement in the north were those who, like Philip Snowden, infused their rhetoric with the "Come to Jesus" ap-

⁸⁹ WEBB, *My Apprenticeship*, p. 175.

⁹⁰ On the contribution of Methodism to the working class movement, see the various books by R.F. WEARMOUTH, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England, 1800-1850*, (London, 1937); *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes*, (Nottingham, 1955). Eric Hobsbawm has written of the Primitive Methodists that "...it is not too much to think of them as primarily a sect of trade union cadres;" see "The Labour Sects," in *Primitive Rebels*, (Manchester, 1959) p. 138.

⁹¹ JOHNSON, *Willie Pick*, p. 39.

peal. Many of the prominent activists conceived their socialism primarily in religious and ethical terms, and the enormous popularity of Keir Hardie, Katherine and J. Bruce Glasier, Carolyne Martyn, Margret McMillan, and John Trevor cannot be divorced from these perorations.⁹² They all held to the distinction that J. Morrison Davidson had drawn between "Christianity" and "Churchianity," and combined their "religion" with a sharp deprecation of the established churches.⁹³ And yet it was "the religion of socialism" that fell most naturally from their lips.

At the local level too, it was the "religion of socialism" that gained most ground among the working class. Hall Caine, writing in *The Labour Leader* in 1901, argued that although many of the I.L.P. rank and file were "like myself outside the churches," he contended that they were "holding into the fundamental things of the Christian religion", and that the I.L.P. was waging "whatever the churches may say, a religious, not an irreligious war."⁹⁴ In Nelson, as in most areas of Lancashire, the I.L.P. drew support away from the secular inclined S.D.F. by virtue of their Nonconformity and manifestly religious stance, and by their espousal of such causes as teetotalism.⁹⁵ *Manchester*, the local journal of the Manchester I.L.P., declared in 1901 its crusade to be a continuation of that initiated by Jesus Christ,⁹⁶

...He preached a simple doctrine... the good of the many... that we must suffer for the good of others; that true religion was *self-sacrifice*; that God's kingdom was a spiritual kingdom... Essentially did he preach the gospel of love... The working men, whose conditions most require mending, should be treated with the loving respect of a wounded brother, though a man with equal rights... If the grand political doctrine, "love one another" were only carried out thoroughly, what a wonderful reform it would make! It is not Utopian: try it! The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand: it is *here*: but it must be in you before you are in it.

An earlier edition had expounded upon "...the true Christian Socialism of the Sermon on the Mount... The ethics of socialism are identical with the ethics of Christianity."⁹⁷

Ethical socialism embodied a dual appeal for the Lancashire Nonconformist mind. In the first place it seemed immediately relevant, and challenged what to many seemed the most glaring abuses. The national programme of the I.L.P., adopted at their Manchester conference in 1894, included demands for such reforms as the Eight Hour Day; the abolition of overtime, piecework and child employment; social security provisions

⁹² For Keir Hardie's ethical conception of socialism, see K.O. MORGAN's recent biography, *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist*, (London, 1975) pp. 8-9, 201-17; for the Glasiers, see L. THOMPSON, *The Enthusiasts: A Biography of John and Katherine Bruce Glasier*, (London, 1971) pp. 88-91; for the McMillan sisters, see D. CRESSWELL, *Margaret McMillan: A Memoir*, (London, 1948) and M. McMILLAN, *The Life of Rachel McMillan*, (London, 1927). For John Trevor's evolution towards ethical socialism, see his autobiography *My Quest for God*, (London, 1898).

⁹³ J. Morrison DAVIDSON, *The Old Order and the New*, (London, n.d.) p. 113.

⁹⁴ *The Labour Leader*, 28 December 1901.

⁹⁵ FIRTH, *Socialism in Nelson and District*, pp. 20-21.

⁹⁶ *Manchester: The Local Journal of the I.L.P.*, No. 21, January 1901.

⁹⁷ *Manchester*, No. 15, July 1900.

for the sick, elderly and disabled financed by a tax upon unearned incomes; free, unsectarian primary, secondary and university education; remunerative work for the unemployed, and the "taxation to extinction of unearned incomes."⁹⁸ This side of the movement was pragmatic, opposed to doctrinal insistence and flexible enough for socialists to adapt the agitation to the needs of local conditions. At the same time, there was offered by ethical socialism the promise of a utopia — the "brotherhood of man" — and it was this vague and sentimental strain that gave the movement its defining flavour. Here the themes of love, brotherhood, charity and justice reappear, but significantly rooted in the real world. Young men and women were attracted to the enthusiasm and comradeship of "The Cause," its communality and fun. They threw themselves with fervour into all that socialism entailed; in their meetings and discussions, their cycling clubs, socialist choirs and hymns, in their rambles and outings on the Lancashire moors, above all in the pure fellowship of socialist endeavour, these enthusiasts were living out their New Jerusalem. "I cannot say that we youngsters of the socialist fellowship were unduly depressed," remembers one of these early activists, "...for in essence we were 'as full of spirits as the month of May'."⁹⁹ Ethical socialism drew the support and devotion of the working class as much by its ability to enroll members in a rich social and cultural association, as by its formal political programme. I.L.P. and *Clarion* branch life was rich and varied; it allowed working people through their own collective efforts to forge a culture which allowed for active participation and control generally. We find, then, that not only might religious themes inform political consciousness, but those social relationships fundamental to chapel and community life were extended and renewed in socialist form.

It can, perhaps, be most clearly seen in the Labour Church movement, and in the socialist Sunday schools, how the ideals and social patterns that the Lancashire working population found in chapel life were recreated in a new and higher form. But especially indicative of the simultaneously social and religious appeal of the movement, it is no accident that the various bodies which comprised Robert Blatchford's *Clarion* organisation should come to be called a "social fellowship". Annie Kenney, in later years a militant suffragette, spoke for many ordinary men and women when she recalled the responsive chord which Blatchford's writings had struck with her; "I became interested in Labour, or I should say in Robert Blatchford's articles appearing in *The Clarion*. His writings on Nature, Poetry, Philosophy, Life, were my great weekly treat. Thousands of men and women in the Lancashire factories owe their education to Robert Blatchford."¹⁰⁰ Men and women of differing backgrounds and disparate views joined, worked for, and lived the *Clarion* fellowship, unit-

⁹⁸ J. CLAYTON, *The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain, 1880-1924*, (London, 1926) pp. 77-78.

⁹⁹ FOLEY, *A Bolton Childhood*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁰ KENNEY, *Memoirs*, p. 23; see further, R. KENNEY, *Westering*, (London, 1939) pp. 23-25.

ed by the vision of socialism that Blatchford had offered them.¹⁰¹ The "sentiment of altruism," or, as he sometimes described it, the "religious sentiment," was the basis of this vision,¹⁰²

Sever the socialist movement from altruistic sentiment and it is a lost cause. Never without the impetus of human love can socialism be established! Losing the sentiment of human love it could not last. Reduced to a mechanical system of cold justice and economic organisation, it would become more hateful and less endurable, than the anarchy which now prevails.

For Blatchford, the term altruism meant simply the command to "Love thy neighbour as thyself," and "it probably owed its origins to Christ..."¹⁰³ All this led Blatchford to a specific conception of socialism: "If socialism is to live and conquer it must be a religion. If socialists are to prove themselves equal to the task assigned them they must have a faith, a real faith, a new faith."¹⁰⁴ It is ironic that Blatchford, who, after 1900 launched a series of stinging attacks upon orthodox Christianity, and was regarded by clergymen and other luminaries as the greatest infidel at work, should lend inspiration to a "religious" movement. Certainly, his "religion" had nothing in common with the "cant" and "formality" so manifestly displayed by the churches. "I do not attack religion", he wrote, "but only the pretence of religion...;" or again, "Our new religion turns its back on the churches, with their symbolisms and ceremonies and display and teaches us that love and mercy and art are the highest forms of worship."¹⁰⁵

Blatchford had truly struck a responsive chord. His socialism gave practical expression and made strikingly relevant themes basic to working class life, chapels and religion. In the end, this working class consciousness cannot be understood apart from the "religion of socialism,"¹⁰⁶

...the Religion of Socialism is a phrase first used, I think, in 1885 in the manifesto of the Socialist League... We have the right to refuse the name of socialist to those who have not grasped the economic truth. But an economic theory alone, or any number of economic theories will not make a religion. If you

¹⁰¹ For the Clarion "Social Fellowship" see A. NEIL LYONS, *Robert Blatchford: The Sketch of a Personality*, (London, 1910) pp. 111-113; L. THOMPSON, *Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman*, (London, 1951) pp. 157-60. In many respects, I.L.P. branch life was very similar to the Clarion fellowship. The I.L.P. was described by W.J. STEWART, *J. Keir Hardie*, (London, 1924) p. 74, as "...a great social fellowship, joining together in bonds of friendship all of its adherents in every part of the land and forming a communion comparable to that of some religious fraternity whose men have taken vows of devotion to a common cause."

¹⁰² *Altruism: Christ's Glorious Gospel of Love against Man's Dismal Science of Greed*, Clarion Pamphlet 22, (1898) p. 6.

¹⁰³ *The Labour Prophet*, May 1897.

¹⁰⁴ *The Clarion*, 25 April 1896.

¹⁰⁵ *Socialism: A Reply to the Encyclical of the Pope*, (1892), p. 18; *The New Religion*, Clarion Pamphlet 9, (1896) p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted by S. YEO, "A Phase in the Social History of Socialism, c. 1885-1895," *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 22, (1971) p. 6. It might be objected that this socialist enthusiasm was by this time entirely secular, even if religious in emotional background. Against this, the distinction drawn by Royden Harrison in discussion of Yeo's paper, between the religious, secular religious and secular, is perhaps instructive. In this respect, the socialism of the period had a secular religious character; see *ibid.*, p. 8.

want socialism to be a religion, you must widen your definition of socialism. You must draw out all the ethical and spiritual implications of these desires and efforts for a juster social order... A new conception of life is taking shape, to which it is affection, if not folly, to refuse the name of Religion...

VI

We may summarise the main threads of this paper as follows. Religion among the working class of late nineteenth century Lancashire may well have been more pervasive, and more widely accepted than is usually assumed. While it may be conceded that the regular church- and chapel-goers were drawn, in large measure, from the upper reaches of the working population, religious sentiment and chapel attachment were by no means absent among the main body of the working class. Religion offered hope and a sense of coherence and self-respect in a hostile world. It is significant that socialism held out very much the same attraction, and it appealed on the whole, to those for whom religion was deeply felt, but perhaps by late century losing its urgency and relevance. Neither, then, can be said to have been simply the ideological delusions of a labour aristocracy — the appeal of both religion and socialism being somewhat wider than this suggests; nor can it be upheld that socialism simply took the place Nonconformity had once held in working class life. Ethical socialism may more correctly be seen as building upon, and developing on the political plane, those religious ideals and social patterns basic to popular life.

Secondly, we have suggested that a fruitful approach to the problem of working class consciousness, which could be more sympathetic to the complexities and shadings, the variations which social consciousness has historically shown, might begin by locating and examining the growth of this consciousness within the way of life that engendered it. Ideas are not abstractions, plucked, as it were, from thin air, but emerge out of, and cannot but be therefore intimately related to, the institutions and social relationships within which men interact and struggle for the ideas they believe to be correct. Of course, the chapels were but one institution of Lancashire popular life, and as such can offer only a partial picture. A fuller appreciation of working class consciousness demands that we strive to appreciate the whole culture — the complex set of social and institutional relationships — which gave it birth.