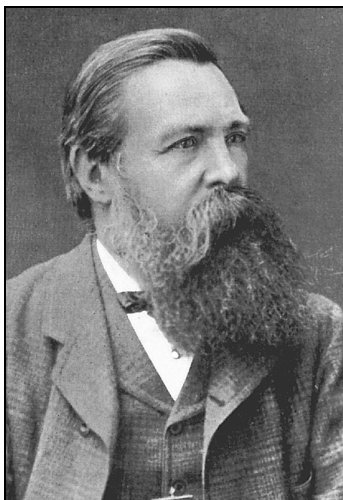


**A Contribution to the History of**  
**Primitive**  
**Christianity**

**By Frederick Engels**



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# **A Contribution to the History Of Primitive Christianity**

**By Frederick Engels**

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## I.

The history of primitive Christianity presents curious points of contact with the modern labor movement. Just like the latter, Christianity, in its inception, was a movement of the oppressed: it appeared first as the religion of slaves and freedmen, of the poor and unprotected, of the peoples subjugated and dispersed by Rome. Both, Christianity and Socialism, preach a coming redemption from bondage and misery; and while Christianity postpones this redemption to a life after death—Heaven—Socialism strives for it in this world through a transformation of society. Both were and are being persecuted and hunted, their adherents ostracized, put under exceptional laws, the former as enemies of the human race, the latter as foes of the State, of religion, the family and of the social order. And despite all persecution, aye, even aided thereby, both advance victoriously, irresistibly. Three hundred years after its inception, Christianity became the recognized State religion of the Roman world empire, and within barely sixty years Socialism has conquered for itself a position assuring it absolute victory.

If, therefore, Professor Anton Menger, in his *Right to the Full Proceeds of Labor*, wonders why, with the colossal centralization of landownership under the Roman emperors, as well as the intense sufferings of the then working class, consisting almost exclusively of slaves, “at the time of the fall of the Western Roman empire Socialism did not arise”—then he simply does not see that “Socialism,” in so far as was then possible, existed in point of fact and ruled—through Christianity. Only that this Christianity, as could not be otherwise under existing historic conditions, would not bring about the social transformation in this world but in the hereafter, in Heaven, in the eternal life after death, in the ever imminent “Millennium.”

The parallel of both historic phenomena already comes to the fore in the Middle Ages, anent the first uprisings of oppressed peasants and, notably so, in the case of urban plebeians. These mass movements, like all uprisings of the Middle Ages, necessarily carried a religious mask, appeared as a rejuvenation of primitive Christianity that has suffered degeneration<sup>\*</sup>; but invariably there were hidden

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<sup>\*</sup> A curious contrast thereto is furnished by the religious uprisings of the Mohammedan world, particularly in Africa. Islam is a religion adapted to Orientals, more specifically Arabs, that is, on the one hand to trading and craftsman city dwellers, and, on the other, to nomadic Bedouins of the

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behind this religious exaltation rather two-fisted worldly interests. This appeared most strikingly in the organization of the Bohemian Taborites under John Zizka of glorious memory; but the entire medieval world exhibits this feature, subsiding gradually after the German Peasant War, only to reappear with the Labor Communists after 1830. The French revolutionary Communists, as well as Weitling and his adherents, leaned upon primitive Christianity long before Ernest Renan had said: "If you would get a conception of the first Christian congregation, inspect a local 'Section' of the International Workingmen's Association."

The French belletristic writer who, upon the basis of a plagiarism of the German Bible critique unmatched even in our modern journalism, produced the historic novel *Origines du Christianisme*, himself did not know how much truth there was in these words. I would like to see the member of the old International who, for instance, could read the so-called second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians without old wounds breaking up {open?} anew{,} at least in one respect. The entire Epistle, from Chapter 8 onward, re-echoes the eternal, oh, so well known lamentation: *les cotisations ne retrent pas*—the dues refuse to come! How many of the most diligent propagandists of the sixties would not understandingly clasp the hand of the writer of such an epistle, whoever he may be, and whisper in his ear: "Did you too fare that way? We also can sing the same song—our Association, too, was crammed with 'Corinthians'—these dues that failed to come, which unreachably fluttered before our tantalized eyes, these were the very 'millions of the International.'"

One of our best sources about the first Christians is Lucian of Samosata, the Voltaire of classic antiquity, who maintained an attitude of even skepticism toward all kinds of religious superstition, and who, for that reason, had neither Pagan-

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desert. And therein lies the germ of periodically recurring collisions. The city dwellers become rich, luxurious, lax in the observance of the "law." The Bedouins, poor, and because of their poverty strictly moral, look with envy and covetousness upon these riches and pleasures. Then they flock together under a prophet, a "Mahdi," to punish the renegades, to re-establish respect for the ceremonial law and the true faith, and, as a reward, to take in the treasures of the faithless. After a hundred years they stand just where the former faithless stood; a new cleansing of the faith becomes necessary, a new Mahdi arises, and the game begins anew. So it has gone on from the time of the conquering raids of the African Almoravides and Almohades into Spain, down to the last Mahdi of Chartum [Khartoum], who so successfully defied the British. And so, or much like it, has it been in Persia and other Mohammedan countries. These are all movements clad in a religious garb but proceeding from economic causes; and, even when successful, they permit the old economic conditions to continue untouched. Therefore, all remains as it was and collisions become periodic. In the popular uprisings of the Christian West, however, the religious garb serves only as a flag or mask for attacks upon an obsolete economic order; the latter is finally overthrown, a new one arises and the world progresses.—*Author's footnote.*

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religious nor political reasons to treat the Christians differently from any other religious association. On the contrary, he scoffed at all of them because of their superstitions, the devotees of Jupiter no less than the devotees of Christ; from his flatly rationalist standpoint one kind of superstition is as silly as another. This certainly non-partisan witness tells among other things the life history of an adventurer named Peregrinus, who called himself Proteus and hailed from Parium on the Hellespont. Said Peregrinus, in his youth, was caught in Armenia committing adultery and was severely mauled according to the custom of the country. He managed to escape, strangled his father in Parium and had to flee. “And then it came about”—I quote from the translation of Schott—“that he came to know about the wondrous wisdom of the Christians, with whose priests and scribes he had had intercourse in Palestine. In a short time he advanced so far that his teachers seemed like children in comparison. He became prophet, church elder, master of the synagogue, in short, everything; he interpreted their writings and himself wrote such in great number, so that, finally, they believed and saw in him a superior being, permitted him to frame their laws and named him after their headman (Bishop). . . . In connection therewith [i.e., as a Christian], Proteus was on one occasion arrested by the authorities and thrown into prison. . . . While he was so confined, the Christians, who regarded his imprisonment a great misfortune, made every possible effort to liberate him. But they did not succeed, and then every possible care and succor was bestowed upon him. At the break of day, one could see old women, widows and orphans, linger at the portals of the prison; the more prominent Christians bribed the turnkeys and spent night after night with him; they carried meals and read their holy books to him; in short, the precious Peregrinus (he still went by that name) was to them nothing short of another Socrates. Even from the cities of Asia Minor appeared deputations of Christian congregations, to offer him a helping hand, to comfort him and to become his spokesmen before the court. It is incredible how quickly these people are at hand in a matter that concerns their association, and in such case they spare neither effort nor money. In this manner, money flowed to Peregrinus from all sides, so that his imprisonment became to him the source of an ample income. These poor people have persuaded themselves that, body and soul, they are immortal and that they will live for all eternity; and so it comes about that they hold death in contempt, and that many of them embrace it voluntarily. Also their highest lawmaker has instilled into their minds that they would be like brothers among themselves as soon as they

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had come over to the faith, that is, had abandoned the Greek gods, worshipped that crucified sophist and lived according to his laws. Therefore they have but little care for all worldly goods and possess them collectively—teachings which they have accepted on faith without investigation and without proof. If, then, a clever knave approaches them, one who can make skillful use of the circumstances, he can presently become a rich man and laugh in his sleeve at the silly gudgeons. However, Peregrinus was set free by the then Prefect of Syria.”—And, after relating some other adventures, it is said: “Our man now went forth a second time (from Parium), tramping about, and instead of money it was the goodnaturedness of the Christians that saw him through; everywhere they acted as his escort and let him want for nothing. For a time he was thus taken care of. But when he violated also the laws of the Christians—I believe he had been seen eating something that was forbidden—they excluded him from their association.”

What reminiscences of my youth do not arise at this description by Lucian! There was, first of all, the “Prophet Albrecht” who, from about 1840 on, made the Weitling Communist groups in Switzerland his pasture in the most literal sense of the term—a big, strong man with a long beard, wandering afoot through the whole of Switzerland and digging up listeners for his New World-liberating gospel—but who, on the whole, seems to have been a rather harmless confusionist and who soon died. Then there is his much less harmless successor, “Dr.” Georg Kuhlmann from Holstein, who utilized the time Weitling was imprisoned to convert the Weitling groups in the French-speaking part of Switzerland to his gospel, at times with such success that he captured the most able and most dissolute among them—August Becker. Kuhlmann treated them to lectures which, in 1845, were published at Geneva under the title: *The New World, or the Realm of the Spirit on Earth. Annunciation*. In the introduction thereto, written by his adherents (probably by August Becker) it is said:

“There was wanting a man in whose mouth all our sufferings, and all our longings and hopes, in one word, all that moves our time to its innermost depth, would become vocal. . . . This man, for whom the world has waited, has appeared. He is Dr. Georg Kuhlmann from Holstein. He has come forth with the doctrine of the New World or the Realm of the Spirit in Reality.”

It is scarcely necessary to add that this doctrine of the New World was nothing but the most common sentimentality, clad in semi-Biblical parlance a la Lamennais, and uttered with all the arrogance of a prophet. All of which did not prevent the

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good-natured Weitlingians from exalting this swindler in much the same way as did the Christians of Asia Minor in the case of Peregrinus. They, who were otherwise so arch-democratic and equalitarian *a l'outrance*, in such measure that they entertained grave suspicions against every schoolmaster, journalist, and against every non-craftsman, as a “learned man” who would exploit them, it was they who permitted this melodramatic Kuhlmann to impress upon them that in the “New World” the wisest, i.e., Kuhlmann, would regulate the distribution of all pleasures and that, because thereof, even now, and in the Old World, the disciples of the wisest man should carry to him pleasures by the bushel and themselves be content with the crumbs. Thus Peregrinus-Kuhlmann lived on the fat of the land and at the expense of the groups—while it lasted. It did not last very long; the growing grumblings of the doubters and unbelievers, as well as an impending prosecution on the part of the Vaud Cantonal Government put an end to the “Realm of the Spirit” in Lausanne—Kuhlmann vanished.

Any one, who has known by experience the very beginning of the European labor movement, will be able to recall dozens of such cases. Today, such extreme cases have become impossible, at least in the larger centers, but in the more remote regions, where the movement takes up new territory, a little Peregrinus may meet with temporary and limited success. And as the labor movement of all countries is invaded by all elements that have nothing more to hope from the official world, or have there run their course—anti-vaccinationists, temperance people, vegetarians, anti-vivisectionists, “natural” healers, pulpit-less preachers who have become minus a congregation, authors of new theories as to the origin of the world, unsuccessful or derailed inventors, sufferers of real or imagined wrong, those whom the bureaucrats designate as “useless kickers,” honest fools and dishonest knaves—just so did the first Christians fare. All these elements, whom the process of disintegration of the old world jettisons, i.e., crowds out of the chance to make a living, one after another came within the circle of attraction of Christianity as the one element that withstood this process of disintegration—because it was the very product of that process—and which remained and waxed, while the other elements were but ephemeral phenomena. Not a visionary fad, tomfoolery or downright swindle that would not crowd in on the young Christian congregations, and did not, for a time at least and in some places, find open ears and willing believers. And, just like our first Communist labor groups, did the early Christians exhibit toward things that seemed to come their way so illimitable a credulity that one cannot be altogether

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certain whether of the “great number of writings” which Peregrinus produced for Christianity, one fragment or another may not have found its way into our New Testament.

### *II.*

The German Bible critique, thus far the only scientific basis of our knowledge of the history of primitive Christianity, has run out in a two-fold direction.

One of these is the Tuebingen school, to which, in a wider sense, belongs also D.F. Strauss. In the matter of critical investigation, it goes as far as a theological school can go. It admits that the four Gospels are not reports of eye-witnesses, but later revampings of lost writings, and that of the Epistles attributed to the Apostle Paul only four at most are genuine, etc. It eliminates all miracles and all contradictions as inadmissible in recorded history; but for the rest it seeks “to save what may be saved,” and then its true character as a school of theology comes very much to the fore. Therewith it has made possible that Renan, who has his main footing there, by applying the same method, has “saved” still more, and would impose upon us as historically authenticated not only many more than doubtful New Testament stories, but also a mass of other martyr legends. In any event, whatever the Tuebingen school has rejected in the New Testament as unhistoric or smuggled in, may be regarded as having been finally eliminated so far as science is concerned.

The other direction is represented by one man—Bruno Bauer. His great merit consists not only in the ruthless criticism of the four Gospels and Apostolic Epistles, but also in that he has undertaken a serious investigation not only of the Jewish and Greek-Alexandrian, but also of the pure Greek and Greek-Roman elements which really opened for Christianity the road toward becoming a world religion. The legend of a Christianity that emanated from Judaism all cut and dried, and which proceeded from Palestine to conquer the world with essentially fixed dogmas and ethics, that has become impossible since Bruno Bauer; only in the theological faculties can that legend continue to vegetate, or with people who want to “preserve religion to the people” even at the expense of science. The tremendous share which the Philonic school of Alexandria and the Greek-Roman vulgar philosophy—the Platonic and chiefly the Stoic—have in the formation of Christianity, which under Constantine became the State religion, has by no means been ascertained in detail;



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but its existence has been proved and that is principally the work of Bruno Bauer. It is he who has laid the foundation of the proof that Christianity was not imported and imposed upon the Roman-Greek world from without, from Judea, but that, at least in its aspect as a world religion, was the very product of that world. Of course, Bauer, like all people who struggle against deeply rooted prejudice, in this work shot way beyond the mark. In order to fix the influence of Philo, and, above all, of Seneca, upon formative Christianity in a literary sense, and to depict the writers of the New Testament almost as plagiarists of these philosophers, he is forced to set the time of inception of the new religion a half century later, must reject the contrary statements of Roman historians and generally take considerable liberties with historic presentation. According to him, Christianity as such arose only under the Flavian Emperors, and the New Testament literature as late as Hadrian, Antonin and Marcus Aurelius. Therewith disappears for Bauer every bit of historic background for the stories of the New Testament about Jesus and his disciples; these dissolve into legends wherein the internal phases of development and the emotional struggles of the first Christian churches are transferred to more or less fictitious persons. Not Galilee and Jerusalem, but Alexandria and Rome are, according to Bauer, the birthplaces of the new religion.

If, therefore, the Tuebingen school, in the residue of the New Testament history and literature that is uncontested even by itself, offers the extreme maximum of what science today can accept as at least controversial, Bruno Bauer offers a maximum of what may therein be contested. Between these two boundaries lies actual truth. Whether this truth can be ascertained with the means at hand today appears very dubious. New finds, especially in Rome, in the Orient and, above all, in Egypt, will contribute far more than all criticism.

But we have within the New Testament one single book the writing of which, in point of time, can be fixed within a few months; a book that must have been written June, A.D. 67, and January or April, 68, which belongs therefore to the very beginning of the Christian era, which mirrors the then conceptions with the most naïve fidelity and in a corresponding idiomatic language, and which, for that reason and according to my opinion, is of far greater importance for the ascertainment of what primitive Christianity really was like than the entire remaining New Testament, in its present form a much later production. That book is the so-called Revelation of St. John the Divine, and since this apparently most obscure book of the entire Bible has become, thanks to the German critique, the most

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comprehensive and transparent, I shall inform my readers thereof.

One has but to take a look at this book in order to become convinced, not only of the exaltation of the author, but also of the surrounding milieu wherein he had his being. Our “Revelation” is not the only one of its kind and time. From the year 164, B.C., when the first revelation preserved to us, the so-called Book of Daniel, was written, until about 250, A.D., the approximate date of the Commodian *Carmen*\* Renan enumerates not less than fifteen classic “Apocalypses” that have been preserved, to say nothing of later imitations. (I quote Renan for the reason that his book, even outside interested circles, is best known and most accessible.) It was a time when, even in Rome and Greece, and to a far greater extent in Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt, an absolutely uncritical mixture of the grossest superstitions of the most different peoples was accepted unquestioningly, supplemented by pious deception and direct charlatanism; when miracles, trances, visions, spirits, predictions of the future, gold-making, cabalism and other occult and marvelous sorceries played a big role. That was the atmosphere wherein primitive Christianity had its origin, and at that among a class of people who, more than any other, had an open ear for that kind of supernatural phantasmagoria. Indeed, it was the Christian Gnostics of Egypt who, during the second century, as proved among others by the Leyden papyrus writings, dabbled strongly in alchemy and embodied alchemist conceptions in their teachings. And the Chaldaic and Jewish *mathematici* who, according to Tacitus, were twice driven out of Rome for sorcery, once under Claudius and again under Vitellius, these practices no other geometrical arts than we find again in the essence of the Revelation of St. John the Divine.

There is another matter. All the apocalypses assume the right to deceive their readers. Not only have they as a rule been written by entirely different—and mostly later—persons than their alleged authors, for instance, the Book of Daniel, the Book of Enoch, the Apocalypses of Ezra, Baruch, Juda, the Sybillinic books, etc., but they also prophesy, in the main of their contents, events long past and thoroughly known to the real author. Thus the author of the Book of Daniel, in the year 164, shortly before the death of Antiochus-Epiphanes, makes Daniel, supposed to have lived at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, predict the rise and fall of the Persian and Macedonian empires, as well as the beginning of Roman world rule, in order that,

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\* This refers to Commodianus, a Christian Latin poet, who flourished about 250 A.D., author of two extant Latin poems, “Instructiones” and “Carmen,” first published in 1852 by J.B. Pitra from a manuscript in the Middlehill collection, now at Cheltenham, and supposed to have been brought from the monastery of Bobbio.—*Translator’s footnote.*

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on the strength of such proof of his potentiality as a prophet, the reader be made receptive for the final prophecy: that the people of Israel will endure all sufferings and be victorious in the end. If the Revelation of St. John were really the work of the ostensible author, it would constitute the sole exception in the entire apocalyptic literature.

The John who claims to be the author no doubt was a man of note among the Christians of Asia Minor. The tone of the pastoral letters to the seven churches vouches for that. Possibly, therefore, he may be identical with the Apostle John whose existence, while not historically authenticated, is nevertheless very probable. And, should this apostle really be the author, then all the better for our standpoint. It would be the best attestation that the Christianity of this book is the real, genuine primitive Christianity. In passing it may be observed that the Revelation, as has been proved, does not proceed from the same author as the Gospel, or the three Epistles also attributed to John.

The Revelation consists of a series of visions. In the first appears Christ, clad in the vestments of a High Priest, walking between seven golden candlesticks, which represent the seven Asiatic churches, and dictates to "John" the letters to the seven "angels" of these churches. Right at the beginning, the difference between this Christianity and the Constantine world religion, as formulated by the Council of Nice, comes strikingly to the fore. The Trinity not only is here unknown; it is an impossibility. Instead of the later, single and only Holy Ghost, we have here the "seven Ghosts of God," construed by the Rabbis from Isaiah XI, 2. Christ is the son of God, the first and the last, the Alpha and Omega, but by no means God himself or equal with God; on the contrary, he is "the beginning of the creature of God," therefore an eternally existing but subordinate emanation of God, similar to the aforesaid seven ghosts. Chapter XV, 3, the martyrs in Heaven sing "the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" for the glorification of God. Here Christ appears not only as subordinate to God, but in a certain sense on the same level with Moses. Christ is crucified in Jerusalem, but resurrected, and he is "the Lamb" sacrificed for the sins of the world with whose blood the believers of all tongues and peoples have been purchased for God. Here we find the fundamental conception that made it possible for primitive Christianity to grow into a world religion. All the then religions of Semites and Europeans shared the idea that the Gods, offended by the actions of men, could be propitiated by sacrifices; the first revolutionary fundamental idea (borrowed from the Philonic school) of Christianity

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was that, through the great, voluntary sacrifice of a mediator, the sins of all men of all times could be atoned—for the believers. Therewith, the need of all further sacrifices disappeared and with it the basis of a mass of religious ceremonies; to be free from ceremonies, which make difficult or prohibit intercourse with those of a different faith, was the first requisite condition for a world religion. But for all that, so deeply was the custom of sacrifices engraved upon the popular mind, that Catholicism—which readopted so much that is Pagan—found it necessary to adapt itself to this fact by the introduction of an at least symbolic sacrifice in the Holy Mass.—Of the dogma of hereditary sin, not even a trace is to be found in this book.

The most significant feature in these letters, as in the entire book, is that never does it occur to the author to designate himself and his fellow believers other than as—Jews. The sectarians in Smyrna and Philadelphia, against whom he inveighs, he accuses that “they say they are Jews and they are not, but are the synagogue of Satan”; and of those of Pergamos it is said: “They hold fast to the teaching of Balaam, who taught through Balak to erect an eye-sore before the children of Israel, to eat of sacrifices to false gods and to practice whoredom.” We are not here introduced to conscious Christians, but to people who claim to be Jews; true, their Judaism is a new development of the former Judaism, but for that very reason the only genuine one. Therefore, at the appearance of the saints before the throne of God, come first 144,000 Jews—12,000 from each of the 12 tribes—and only then the countless mass of the Heathens converted to this revamped Judaism. So little did our author understand, in the year 69, A.D., that he represented an entirely new religious development, one destined to become one of the most revolutionary elements of the human mind.

We see therefore that the then, not yet self-conscious Christianity, was utterly different from the later, dogmatically fixed world religion of the Council of Nice; the one cannot at all be recognized in the other. Neither the dogmatics nor the ethics of that later Christianity exist here; but, instead, a sentiment that they are engaged in a struggle against an entire world and will come out victoriously; a combativeness and assurance of victory that the Christians of today have lost entirely, which in our time is to be found only at the other end of the social pole, with the Socialists.

Indeed, the struggle against an at first overwhelming world, and the simultaneous struggle of the innovators among themselves, is common to both, the primitive Christians and the Socialists. Both these large movements have not been made by leaders and prophets—although both have plenty of the latter—they are

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mass movements. And mass movements, in the beginning, are necessarily confused; they are confused because all mass thinking at first moves in contradictions, perplexities and incongruities, but confused also because of the role the prophets play therein at the beginning. The confusion manifests itself in the formation of numerous sects, which among themselves struggle at least as fiercely within as they do against the common foe without. So it was in primitive Christianity, and, precisely so, in the beginning of the Socialist movement, however much sorrow it may have brought to well-meaning, honest gentlemen, who preached unity where no unity was possible.

Was the International held together by a uniform dogma? On the contrary. There were Communists of the French tradition prior to '48, and these again of many shades; Communists of the Weitling school and others of the regenerated Communist Bund; Proudhonists, prevalent in France and Belgium; the German Labor party; finally, Bakounist Anarchists who, for the moment, had the upper hand in Italy and Spain—and these were only the main groups. From the foundation of the International, it took a full quarter of century until the separation from the Anarchists was finally and everywhere accomplished, and unity, at least in regard to the most general economic viewpoints, had been established. And that with our means of communication, railways, the telegraph, the industrial giant cities, the press and organized public meetings.

In the case of the primitive Christians there existed the same splitting up into numberless sects, which became the very means to force discussion and through that subsequent unity. Already in this, doubtlessly our oldest Christian document, do we find these sects, and our author declaims against them with the same irreconcilable vehemence displayed against the great world of sin without. First, there are the Nicolaitans in Ephesus and Pergamos; those in Smyrna and Philadelphia, who say they are Jews but of the synagogue of Satan; the adherents of the teachings of the false prophet Pergamos, who is called Bileam; those in Ephesus who claim to be apostles but are not; finally, the adherents of the false prophetess, called Jezebel, in Thyatira. We learn of no details about these sects, only of the followers of Bileam and Jezebel it is said that they ate Heathen sacrifices and practiced whoredom. The attempt has been made to regard all these five sects as Paulist Christians, and all the letters are directed against Paul, the false apostle, the alleged Bileam and “Nicolaus.” The not very sound arguments pertaining thereto may be found in Renan’s *St. Paul*, Paris, 1869, pp. 303–5 and 367–70. They

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all endeavor to explain the Epistles through the Acts of the Apostles and the so-called Paulist letters, writings which, at least in their present form, are no less than 60 years younger than the Revelation, and the statements of which in regard to the salient facts are not only doubtful, but totally contradict one another. Decisive is, however, that it could not occur to the author to give to one and the same sect five different designations; for Ephesus alone, two (False Prophets and Nicolaitans), and for Pergamos also two (Bileamites and Nicolaitans), each time specifically as two different sects. The probability cannot be denied that, among these sects, elements could be found which even today could be designated as Paulist.

In the two cases where details are given, the charge is about the eating of idol offerings and the practice of whoredom, two points about which the Jews—the Orthodox as well as the Christian ones—engaged in endless controversies with the converted Pagans. Flesh from idol offerings not only was served on festive occasions, where the rejection of the same might appear rude and might even become dangerous, but was also sold at the public markets where one could not readily tell whether it was “kosher” or not. By whoredom these same Jews did not only mean sexual intercourse out of wedlock, but also marriage between relatives forbidden by the Jewish law on marriage between Jews and Pagans; and that is the meaning usually given to the word in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter XV, 20 and 29. But our John has views of his own about sexual intercourse permitted Orthodox Jews. In Revelation, Chapter XIV, 4, he says of the 144,000 celestial Jews: “These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins.” And, indeed, in the Heaven of our John not a single woman is to be found. He belongs therefore to that bent of mind, found in other writings of antique Christianity, that regards sexual communion as altogether sinful. And if, in addition, we bear in mind that he calls Babylon the “Mother of Harlots,” “with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication,” and “the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies,” then it is not possible to conceive the word in the narrow sense the theological *Apologetics* would attribute to it in order by means of it to dig out confirmation for other portions of the New Testament. On the contrary. These allusions in the letters evidently point to a manifestation common to all deeply stirred times, namely, that as in the case of all other barriers, the traditional bonds of sexual intercourse are being assailed. Even in the first centuries of the Christian era there appears, along side of asceticism, which is to kill the flesh, quite often the

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tendency to extend Christian freedom to a more or less unlimited intercourse between man and woman. Just so it happened in the modern Socialist movement. What awful horror was not caused in the pious German kindergarten during the '30s by the St. Simon *rehabilitation de la chair*, which was translated into "reinstallation of the flesh!" And most awfully shocked were those ruling and notable estates (there were no classes in Germany in those days) who could live neither in Berlin nor in their country mansions without ever repeating the "reinstallation of the flesh!" Aye, if these good people had only known Fourier, who holds out the prospect of still greater aberrations of the flesh! With the outgrowing of utopianism these extravagances have made way for a more rational and in reality much more radical conception, and since Germany has developed from the pious nursery of Heine to the central region of the Socialist movement, one simply laughs at the hypocritical indignation of the distinguished pious world.

That is the entire dogmatic content of the Epistles. For the rest they exhort the adherents to diligent propaganda, to a bold and proud acknowledgment of their belief in the face of the foe, to indefatigable struggle against the enemies without and within—and so far as that goes, they might as well have been written by a prophetically inclined enthusiast of the International.

### *III.*

The Epistles are only the introduction to the real theme of the message of our John to the seven Asiatic churches and, through them, to the remaining reformed Jewry of the year 69, from among whom Christianity had its growth. And therewith we enter the real sanctum sanctorum of primitive Christianity.

From among what sort of people did the first Christians recruit themselves? Chiefly from among the meek and lowly, members of the lowest layers of society, as is proper for a revolutionary element. Of whom did they consist? In the cities of impoverished freemen—all sorts of folk, similar to the poor whites of the Southern slave states and the European driftwood and adventurers in Colonial and Chinese seaports; also of freedmen and especially of slaves. On the large landed estates in Italy, Sicily and Africa mainly of slaves; in the rural districts of the provinces of small farmers falling more and more into the bondage of debt. A common road toward the emancipation of all these elements simply did not exist. To all of these, Paradise was lost and lay behind them; for the impoverished freeman the former

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“Polis,” both City and State, where his forebears had once been free citizens; for the war-captive slave the time of his freedom prior to subjugation and subsequent bondage; for the small farmer the destroyed gentile tribal society with its communal lands. All that, the leveling, iron fist of the conquering Roman had overthrown. The largest social group attained in antiquity was the tribe and the union of several related tribes, organized in the case of barbarians according to consanguine gentes, and, in the case of the city-founding Greeks and Italians, in the Polis embracing members of one or several consanguine tribes. Philip and Alexander bestowed upon the Hellenic peninsula political uniformity, but for all that a Greek nation did not come to pass. Nations became possible only after the fall of Roman domination. It put an end once for all to the smaller political entities, and military power, Roman law and tax-collecting apparatus, definitely dissolved their inherited internal organization. In addition to the loss of independence and particular organization came ruthless robbery on the part of military and civil authorities, who first took away from the subjugated their treasure, and then loaned it to them again at usurious rates of interest, so that they might again be ripe for fresh extortions. The tax pressure, and the crying need for money caused thereby in regions of wholly or chiefly agricultural economy, forced the farmers ever more deeply into the bondage of usurers, created vast differences in wealth possession, enriched the already rich and hopelessly impoverished the poor. And all resistance on the part of the individual small tribes and cities against the gigantic Roman world power was hopeless. What remained there of a way out, an escape for all the enslaved, oppressed and impoverished, a way out jointly for all these heterogeneous human groups with interests either foreign or antagonistic to one another? And yet, one such way out must be found, if one great and single revolutionary movement was to embrace them all.

This way out was found. But it was not of this world. As matters then stood, it could only be a religious way out. And then an entirely new world disclosed itself. The continued existence of the soul after death of the body had gradually and everywhere in the Roman world become a recognized article of faith. Also a sort of reward and punishment for the departed soul for the acts committed on earth was more and more generally accepted. In the matter of rewards things looked none too rosy; the antique world was much too natural-materialistic not to attach to life on earth much greater value than to a realm of shades; in the case of the Greeks, existence after death was considered rather a misfortune. Then came Christianity,



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taking seriously the rewards and the punishments bestowed in the hereafter, created Heaven and Hell—and the way out was found that would lead the weary and burden-loaded from this vale of tears into eternal Paradise. And, indeed, only with the prospect of rewards in a hereafter was it possible to lift to Stoic-Philonic world-renunciation and asceticism to the level of a new ethical fundamental principle in the new world religion that was to sweep along the suppressed masses of the people.

But this heavenly Paradise was not opened to the believers at death and without further ado. We shall see that the Kingdom of God, the capital of which is Jerusalem, is conquered and thrown open only after arduous struggles with the powers of Hell. In the conception of the first Christians, these struggles were quite imminent. Our John, at the very outset, designates his book a revelation of that “which must shortly come to pass”; immediately thereafter he says, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy . . . for the time is near at hand”; to the church at Philadelphia Christ causes to be written: “Behold, I come quickly,” and in the last chapter the angel says he had shown John “the things which must shortly be done,” and tells him, Chapter XXII, 10: “Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand”; and Christ himself is made to say twice (Rev. XXII, 12 and 20): “I come quickly.” Further consideration will reveal how soon this coming was expected.

The apocalyptic visions which the author now presents have all, and mostly literally, been taken from former writings; partly from the classic prophets of the Old Testament, notably Ezekiel, and partly from the later Jewish apocalypses fashioned after the Book of Daniel, especially the book of Enoch, then finished at least in part. The critique has shown in minute detail where our John has purloined every word picture, every ominous sign, every plague poured upon an unbelieving world, in short, the entire material for his book, thereby exhibiting not only very specific mental poverty, but also furnishing proof that he did not experience, even in his imagination, the trances and visions he describes.

The procedure in these spirit visions is briefly as follows: At first John sees God upon his throne, in his hand a book with seven seals, and before him the slain but resurrected lamb (Christ), found worthy of taking the book and of opening the seals thereof. At the opening of the seals all sorts of wondrous things happen. With the fifth seal, John saw under the altar “the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held; and they cried in a loud voice, saying,

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{“}How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” whereupon white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season,” because some more martyrs would yet have to be killed.—Nothing is here said about the “religion of love,” nor of “Love your enemies, and bless those that curse you,” etc.; here unconcealed revenge is being preached, revenge, healthy and honest revenge upon the persecutors of the Christians. And so throughout the book. The closer the crisis approaches, the more thickly plagues and punishments rain down from Heaven, with all the greater glee does our John proclaim that the great masses of mankind will not yet do penance for their sins, that yet more of the vials of the wrath of God must be poured out on them, that Christ must rule them with a rod of iron and “tread the vinepress {wine press?} of the wrath of God,” but that the godless remain unmoved in their hearts. We find here the natural feeling, free from all hypocrisy, of people in the midst of a fight, and that *a la guerre comme a la guerre*.<sup>\*</sup> At the opening of the seventh seal appear seven angels with trumpets; whenever one of them sounds his trumpet, new and terrible things happen. After the seventh angel had sounded his trumpet, seven new angels appear on the stage with the seven vials of the wrath of God, which are then poured out upon the earth, again producing new plagues and punishments, which in the main are a labored repetition of what happened several times before. Then comes the Woman, Babylon, (Rome) the Great Harlot “that sitteth upon many waters, arrayed in purple and scarlet colors, drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus”; she is the great city that is built upon seven hills and “which reigneth over all the kings of the earth.” She sits upon a beast with seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads represent the seven hills, but also seven “kings.” Of these kings “five are fallen,” one exists, the seventh is yet to come, and after him is to come again one of the first five who, wounded to death, will be restored. The latter will rule over the earth for 42 months, or 3<sup>1/2</sup> years, one-half of seven years, will persecute the believers unto death and establish the reign of godlessness. But then comes the great decisive battle, and the saints and martyrs will be revenged {avenged?} by the destruction of the Great Harlot Babylon and all her adherents, i.e., of the great mass of mankind; the devil will be thrown into the bottomless pit where he will be kept for one thousands years, while Christ rules in conjunction

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<sup>\*</sup> *A la guerre conune {comme?} a la guerre*—a French proverb, literally, “In war as in war,” that is, one must adapt himself to conditions—another version of “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.”—*Translator’s note*.

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with the resurrected martyrs. After a thousand years, the devil gets loose again and another great battle of the spirits follows in which he is finally vanquished. Then comes the second resurrection when all the other dead awaken and appear before the judgment seat of God (not of Christ, be it noted), and the believers enter a new Heaven, a new earth and a new Jerusalem for eternal life.

Since this entire structure is build exclusively of Jewish ante-Christian material, it presents hardly any but purely Jewish conceptions. Ever since it began to go hard in this world with the people of Israel, from the Assyrian and Babylonian exactions of tribute, from the downfall of the two kingdoms of Israel and Juda up to the time of the Seleucid\* bondage, that is, from Isaiah to Daniel, whenever there was trouble a redeemer would be prophesied. In the Book of Daniel (XII, 1–3) we already find a prophecy of the coming of Michael, the guardian angel of the Jews, who will deliver them from great trouble; many “that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,” there is going to be some kind of a day of judgment, and “they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.” In the case of John, Christian only is the sharp emphasis given to the coming of the Kingdom of Christ and the glory of the resurrected believers, especially of the martyrs.

For the interpretation of this prophecy, in so far as {it} concerns the events of that time, we are indebted to the German critique, specifically to Ewald, Luecke and Ferdinand Benary. Through Renan it has become accessible even to non-theological circles. That the “Great Harlot” means Rome—the city of the seven hills—has already been indicated. Of the beast upon which she sits it is said (Rev. XVII, 9–11): “The seven heads [of the beast] are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.”

Accordingly, the beast is Roman world domination, represented successively by seven emperors, of whom one has been mortally wounded and no longer reigns, but who is healed and returns, so that, as the eighth, he will bring to perfection the kingdom of blasphemy and defiance of God. It will be given to him “to make war

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\* The Seleucid dynasty, a line of kings who reigned in Nearer Asia from 312 to 65 B.C., established as one of the results of the Macedonian conquest under Alexander. It was under one of these kings, Antiochus IV., that the Maccabean rebellion took place about 168. It was suppressed later, under Demetrius I. Soter, who reigned from 162 to 150, and this is probably the time referred to, as the Jews were then again reduced to bondage.—*Translator’s note.*

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with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of the life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. . . . And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man may buy and sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that had understanding count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six.” (Rev. XIII, 7–8 and 16–18.)

It should be noted that here the boycott is mentioned as measure used by the Roman world power against the Christians—which, obviously, made it an invention of the devil—and we may now proceed to the question: who was this Roman emperor, who reigned once before, was mortally wounded and put aside, and who then is to be the eighth in the role of the Antichrist.

Beginning with Augustus as the first, we have Tiberius as the second, Caligula as the third, Claudius as the fourth, Nero as the fifth, and Galba as the sixth. “Five are fallen, and one is.” Therefore, Nero has fallen, and Galba is. Galba reigned from June 9, 68, to January 15, 69. But immediately after his ascension to the throne, the legions of the Rhine rose in rebellion under Vitellius, while in other provinces other generals prepared military insurrections. In Rome itself the Praetorian Guards mutinied, slew Galba, and made Otho emperor.

From this it would appear that the Revelation was written under Galba, probably toward the end of his reign. Or, at the latest, during the three-months’ reign (to April 15, 69) of Otho, the “seventh.” But who is the “eighth,” who has been and is not? The number 666 reveals that.

Among the Semites—Chaldeans and Jews—there was then in vogue a sort of magic art based upon the double meaning of letters. Since about 300 years prior to the Christian era Hebraic letters had also been used as numerals—a=1, b=2, c=3, d=4, etc. The cabalistic soothsayers then counted the numeral values of the letters of a certain name as a transverse sum, and from that sought to prophesy, for instance, through the formation of words or word combinations of equal numerical value, and thus arrived at conclusions as to the future of the bearer of such name. Secret words were also expressed in this numerical language, and so forth and so on. This “art” was designated with the Greek word *gematriah*—geometry; the Chaldeans, who practiced this art in a business-like manner, and were called

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*mathematici* by Tacitus, were driven out of Rome under Claudius, and, later, once again under Vitellius, presumably for “disorderly conduct.”

Through this kind of mathematics arose the number 666. Behind it is hidden the name of one of the first five Roman emperors. Besides the number 666, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, toward the end of the second century, knew of a variant, 616, which probably arose at a time when the secret of numbers was yet known to many. If the solution to be attained conforms uniformly with two numbers, it is accepted as proved.

Ferdinand Benary of Berlin has furnished this solution. The name is Nero. The number is based upon Neron Kesar, the Hebraic version, attested by the Talmud and by Palmyra inscriptions, of the Greek Neron Kaisar (Emperor Nero), Neronic coins minted in the Eastern half of the empire. Thus, n (nun) = 50; r (resch) = 200; w (waw) for o = 6; n (nun) = 50; k (kaph) = 100; s (samech) = 60; and r (resch) = 200—a total of 666. But if we take for a base the Latin way of writing (Nero Caesar), then the second nun=50 is eliminated and we have 616, the variant for Irenaeus.

Indeed at the time of Galba the entire Roman empire had been thrown into sudden confusion. Galba himself, at the head of the Spanish and Gallic legions, had marched upon Rome to overthrow Nero; the latter fled and had himself killed by a freedman. Against Galba conspired not only the Praetorian Guard in Rome, but also the chief commanders in the provinces, and everywhere new pretenders to the throne turned up and prepared to march with their legions upon the capital. The empire seemed fated to be plunged into internal war, its dissolution appeared imminent. In addition the rumor spread, chiefly in the East, that Nero was not dead, only wounded, that he had fled to the Parthians and would return with a large army, cross the Euphrates and then inaugurate a new and still more bloody reign of terror. Achaia and Asia were chiefly terrified by these reports. And just at this time, when the revelation must have been written, a false Nero appeared who, with a considerable following, established himself near Patmos and Asia Minor, on the island of Kythnos in the Aegean Sea (the modern Thermia), until, yet under Otho, he was killed. Small wonder that, among the Christians, against whom Nero had started the first great persecution, the rumor spread that he would return as the Antichrist, and that his second coming, necessarily linked with a still more ferocious attempt to exterminate the new sect in blood, was the signal and prelude to the coming of Christ, of the great victorious battle against the powers of Hell, and

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of the “shortly” to be erected Millennium, the certain expectation of which caused the martyrs joyfully to meet death.

The Christian literature of the first two centuries, as well as the literature influenced by it, exhibits plenty of indications that the secret of the number 666 was then known to many. Irenaeus himself did not know it any more, but he, like many others at the end of the third century, knew that the beast of the Apocalypse meant the returning of Nero. Then this trace, too, is lost and the Revelation becomes subject to the fantastic interpretations of credulous predictors of the future. I myself have known as a child old people who were awaiting the end of the world and the Day of Judgment in the year 1836, according to a prophecy of old Johann Albrecht Bengel. The prophecy came true, to the year. Only with the difference that the Day of Judgment did not strike a sinful world, but the pious Revelation interpreters, for in that same year old Ferdinand Benary furnished the key to the number 666, and then there were put an end, once for all, to this sort of prophetic arithmetic—the new *gematria*.

Of the Kingdom of God, reserved for the believers, our John can give only a description of externals. It is true, the new Jerusalem is laid out in what might then have been considered ample dimensions, a square of 12,000 stadia, equal to 2,227 kilometers for each side-length, therefore an area of about 5 million kilometers, more than half the area of the United States, and built of sheer gold and precious stones. There God dwells among His elect, sheds light upon them like the sun, and there is no more death, suffering or pain; a stream of the water of life flows through the city upon the banks of which grow the trees of life “which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Renan opines, as a sort of medicinal tea—*L’Antechrist*, p. 542.)

Of such was Christianity made in Asia Minor, its main seat in the year 68, in so far as we may know. Not trace of the Trinity—on the contrary, only the old, single and indivisible Jehovah of later Judaism, who has advanced from the status of a Jewish national God to the only and highest God of Heaven, demanding to reign over all nations, promising forgiveness to the converts and ruthlessly destroying the resisters, in keeping with the antique *parcere subjectis et debellare superbos*.—(Virgil: To spare the conquered and subdue the proud.)

Such a God himself sits in {on?} judgment day and not Christ, as set forth in later versions of the Gospels and Epistles. According to the Persian theory of emanation, quite well known to the later Jewry, Christ, the Lamb, has proceeded

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from God since eternity, just like the “seven Spirits of God,” which, occupying somewhat lower rank, owe their existence to a misunderstanding of a poetic passage in Isaiah (XI, 2). None are God, nor equal to God; they are his inferiors. The Lamb offers himself as a propitiatory sacrifice to atone the sins of the world, and receives therefore in Heaven a distinct advance in rank; and his voluntary death for others is credited to him throughout the whole book as an extraordinary deed, and is not treated as something that would necessarily proceed from his innermost essence. It goes without saying that the entire celestial court, elders, cherubim, angels and saints, is in evidence. Monotheism, from the time of the Zendavesta, in order to become a religion, has ever been compelled to make concessions to polytheism. In the case of the Jews, a chronic backsliding to the Pagan sensual gods continued, until after the exile the celestial court was more closely adapted to the popular imagination by following the Persian fashion. Christianity itself, even after it had put in place of the ever true to himself, rigid Jewish God, a differentiated, mysterious three-fold one, could eliminate among the masses the cult of the old gods only by means of a cult of the saints. Indeed, according to Fallmerayer, it was only about the 9th {ninth?} century that the cult of Jupiter died out in the Peloponnesus, in the Maina and in Arcadia. (*History of the Peninsula Morea*, I., p. 227.) Only the modern bourgeois era, with its Protestantism, once again eliminated the saints and seriously went about setting up differentiated monotheism.

Nor does the Revelation know of the theory of hereditary sin and the redemption through faith. The faith of these embattled first churches is of a different kind than that of the later victorious church; apart from the propitiatory sacrifice of the Lamb, the “coming shortly” of Christ and the imminent Millennium form the essential content, and it is most efficient in its active propaganda, incessant struggle against the foe without and within, proud and joyful acknowledgment of its revolutionary position before Pagan judges and the martyr’s death confident of victory.

We have seen that the author does not yet know that he is something other than a Jew. Therefore, in the entire book, not a word is said about baptism; indeed, there are many indications that baptism is an institution of the second Christian period. The 144,000 believing Jews are being “sealed,” not baptized. Of the saints in Heaven and the believers on earth it is said that they had washed off their sins, and had washed their white robes and made them clean in the blood of the Lamb, but of baptismal water there is no mention. Also the two prophets, who precede the

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appearance of the Antichrist in Chapter XI, do not baptize, and according to Chapter XIX, 10, the testimony of Jesus is not baptism but “the spirit of prophecy.” In all these instances it was but natural to mention baptism if it had then been practiced; we are therefore justified in concluding that the author did not know of it, and that it came to be only when Christians and Jews finally separated.

Neither does the author know anything of the second, later sacrament—the Lord’s Supper. If, in the Lutheran text, Christ promises every Thyatiranean holding to the faith to visit and have supper with him, then this creates a false impression. In the Greek text it reads *deipneso* (I shall eat supper with him), and the English Bible correctly reproduces it with “I shall sup with him.” Of the Lord’s Supper, even in the sense of a mere commemorative meal, absolutely no mention is made.

That the Revelation, a book with its so strangely attested date (68 or 69), is the oldest of the entire Christian literature, cannot be doubted. None other is written in so barbaric a language, teeming with Hebraisms, impossible constructions and grammatical errors. Thus, in Chapter I, 4, it is said literally: “Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come.” That the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are later revampings of writings now lost to us the feeble historic germ no longer recognizable under a rank legendary growth, and that even the few allegedly “genuine” apostolic epistles of Bruno Bauer are either later writings or, at best, older works of unknown authors changed by subsequent editions and interpolations—that may today be denied only by professional theologians and other interested writers of history.

But all the more important it is that we have here a book the origin of which in point of time can be ascertained almost to the month, a book that presents to us Christianity in its most undeveloped form, in a form where, compared with the State religion of the fourth century, and its fully worked-out dogma and mythology, it held the same relative position occupied by the still unformed mythology of the Germans at the time of Tacitus, as contrasted with the mythology of the Edda developed under the influence of Christian and antique elements. The germ of the world religion is there, but that germ embodies as yet a thousand evolutionary possibilities without distinction, later realized in numberless sects.

But for that very reason is this oldest fragment of the formative process of Christianity particularly valuable, because it gives to us, in all its purity, that which Judaism—under strong Alexandrian influence—has contributed to Christianity. Only through the medium of the monotheistic Jewish religion, could



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the finished monotheism of the later Greek vulgar philosophy take on the form wherein alone it could take hold of the masses. But once that medium had been found, it could become a world religion only in the Greek-Roman world, through the further development of, and amalgamation with, the mental treasures acquired by this world.

*(The End)*

## *Afterword*

The monograph of Frederick Engels, dealing with the forces that shaped the very beginning of what at first was a revolutionary movement—such as was bound to come to pass in the decadent days of the social system that dominated the antique world—and which, being taken in hand by the powerful of the earth, grew into a dominant world religion, a CHURCH that in turn helped to enslave the very masses which had sought, blindly and gropingly, to escape slavery and oppression—that monograph, now made accessible to the English-reading public, carries a timely lesson.

The author draws a striking parallel between the early Christian movement and the present day Socialist Labor movement, showing how each of these drew its forces from those elements of society that, in the main, had nothing to lose and much to gain by a social transformation; how the first of these two movements, balked in attaining what material aims it may have had, balked because the material conditions of the time rendered such attainment hopeless, became entirely “spiritual,” i.e., sought realization of its hopes and aspirations not in this life and on this earth but in a rather shadowy beyond, a life after death which, in the nature of things, had to be charted and blue-printed by the prophet and the seer rather than the sociologist, the economist or the social engineer; and how the second of these movements, that of Labor, because the social conditions that make possible the realization of its aims were either at hand or were fast developing, made these aims of this earth and this life—which meant the advocacy of a social transformation designed to end slavery and oppression by putting an end to the exploitation of man by man.

Had the author lived through the world war and the years that have followed it, material would have presented itself for still another parallel. If the rich and powerful of the earth first “adopted” the rising tide of the early Christian movement, and then adapted and shaped their capture to their own end and needs, so did our modern capitalist imperialists seek to harness the ever rising Socialist and Labor movement to their own chariot, succeeding in no small measure during and after the war in most of the belligerent countries, barring Russia where they failed, but including the United States and Japan, where the need of “adoption” was perhaps not quite so pressing a problem as elsewhere among the battlers of

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democracy, Germany, England, Austria, France—all these furnish striking examples how the working class of each was mobilized, and how the organizations of labor, both political and economic, were made subservient to the needs of the master class, and the same holds good for the smaller national units engaged in that stupendous capitalist conflict.

But if, on the one hand, the war and the comparative ease with which the capitalist world could manage to marshal not only the broad masses of the working class for the defense of interests inimical to that working class, but also most of its chosen representatives, revealed a mental unripeness on the part of the workers not looked for in that striking measure prior to the event; on the other hand it has become plain that the setback can be but temporary. The modern movement of Labor cannot be “captured” as Christianity was captured and turned into something else it set out to be. Modern conditions forbid and the very war, kindled by the conflicting interests of rival capitalist groups nationally segregated, has so shaken the entire capitalist structure that the signs of disintegration are apparent to all who have eyes to see. To put the same thought in other words: if the war was fought for markets, i.e., for increased outlets to drain off the ever swelling tide of industrial production, and all that thereby hangs and is implied, then the war has been fought in vain. If anything, the result has been opposite to what was aimed at—as is but natural when one bears in mind that if one quantity, markets, has natural limits, and the other quantity, industrial production, is more or less immeasurable, because capable of prodigious expansion. That, in a measure, reduces a struggle for markets to a fight about one and the same bone on the part of several dogs. And that insures a further upward development of the predestined grave-digger of capitalism—the working class which, driven by conditions which neither side to the class conflict can control, will thereby be rendered unfit of “adoption” as Christianity was adopted.

The Engels monograph is timely in yet another sense. There is now raging in all the churches, Catholic, Jew and Protestant, a more or less fierce conflict between what is called the Modernist faction, and what, for some unaccountable reason, is designated as the Fundamentalist one. The latter are the standpatters; the former the innovators. The latter take their religion “straight,” not subject to amendment or improvement, but to be retained forever and ever more just as “revealed” from on high, and they never wish to investigate the revelation. The former find it ever more difficult to reconcile the fairy tales of the Old and New Testament[s] with the sum

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total of knowledge the race has attained—and they seek a compromise that might enable them to keep their faith—or at least their position in the church—by so amending and interpreting the revelations as to bring them somewhat in harmony with the advance of modern science. From an intellectual point of view the Fundamentalist position is easy to maintain because it does not require any intellect simply to believe and accept on faith all that is handed down. The Modernist position is more difficult. Like all compromising, half-way positions it is hard to hold and requires considerable subtlety to make out a good case without abandoning the entire premise, for which reason, if one follows the arguments presented, one is strongly reminded of what may be called a mental egg dance.

Time was when theology dominated the field; when scientific research existed only on sufferance, and when there was not much sufferance to speak of. The astronomy, chemistry, etc., of the Book of Genesis it was safest (if not best) to accept without too much question. If that good book let organic life—at least that of the vegetable kingdom—be brought forth on the third day of creation, and then let the sun, the moon and the stars follow on the next, the fourth day, thereby raising the nice problem in biology as to whether vegetable life be possible without the thermal and chemical effects of the sun, it was safest not to let one's curiosity run riot—it didn't pay. But man is an inquisitive animal, which accounts for whatever progress has been made. His mind kept on boring and boring into the problem nature presented and, step by step, almost inch by inch, theology was driven from one entrenchment after another, the lost ground being occupied by science first ascertaining the facts and then drawing conclusions. It was a long and bitter fight in which no quarter was given, but the end is not yet. True, theology has been eliminated from the realm of "science," but is battling hard to maintain a toe-hold in all affairs of life where exact demonstration is not, or is not yet feasible.

In these last entrenchments, also to be taken in time, the Modernist-Fundamentalist struggle is going on and is raising quite some dust. The participants are of all shades of Protestant denominations, and the Jews and Catholics come in too, although less conspicuously. Intellectually, too, the participants run the whole scale of mental attainments—and the absence thereof—from the cultured Dr. Guthrie<sup>1</sup> and men of his or like mental caliber, down to morons of the William Jennings Bryan type, who, to quote his own words, would

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<sup>1</sup> Presumably the Rev. Thomas Guthrie, D.D.

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rather that his children know about “The Rock Ages” than the age of rocks,<sup>2</sup> and who, constrained by a faint glimmer of sense, while he objects to have the theory of evolution applied to man, thereby depriving him of his Garden of Eden origin, is not unwilling to let it go at that as to the rest of creation—which is quite a concession, to be sure. How far some of the Modernists are forced to go, when traveling along the path of logic, is illustrated by the Rev. Charles Francis Potter<sup>3</sup> who, organizing a Modernist Bible class, and meeting there with the question: “What reason is there to believe there ever was such a man as Jesus?” is forced to admit that “a very good argument can be made to prove that Jesus did not exist” and that it was for the members of the Bible class to know this argument “and decide for themselves what they think it is worth.”

To one who considers all religious sentiment as a manifestation of an undeveloped mentality, appearing first as a propitiatory offering to forces of nature that were or seemed inimical to the savage mind, and then, on a somewhat higher plane, springing from a desire to give thanks to those same natural forces for favors received—sun worship being naught but that—and later hardening into dogma and an organized church which promise rewards and punishments largely according to the attitude assumed toward that church by the laity, it is but natural that the entire machinery fell into the hands of the powers that be and is used by them under changing social forms as a sort of black police force to “preserve God to the people,” that is, to make the masses amenable to the yoke the upper crust put upon and desire to keep upon their necks for the benefit of the said upper crust—and, in the long run, in the interest of the race which can advance only through the struggle between opposing classes, a struggle as needful to social evolution as friction is needful to mechanics.

The “black police force” feature of religion, or rather of the church, was brought out quite aptly by the Rev. Walter M. Howlett when interviewed on the subject as to whether religious instruction should be imparted in the public schools. The gentleman did not care to commit himself openly to such an innovation, but, said he, “No nation can depend solely upon its police system to preserve its moral fibre. Religious education is a social necessity.” Just so. In a nation where the vast majority of the people have interests flatly opposite to those of the ruling few, the “moral fibre” of the many cannot in the long run be maintained by the police alone;

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scopestrial.org/inhisimage.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/charlesfrancispotter.html>

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the moral influence of the police has to be supplemented and reenforced by something else—the prospect of punishment to come even after death, which, as a “moral inducement,” is frequently far more efficient than all the efforts, “moral” and otherwise, of our police. The present day home, says the good reverend, is not equal to imparting this religious education, because the home has lost much of its former authority due to the advent of our modern industrial civilization, hence some other agency is needed to impress the rising generation with the need of bearing earthly crosses in patience and humility and, sidestep as he did on that question, there is no other agency in sight but the public school.

But all that will not stand. At the time Christianity arose, it rose because a social system was decaying and new one was in the making. All the tricks that the old system had in its bag could not and did not save it.

In our day an obsolete social system is in process of decay, and because thereof a movement has arisen—Socialism—that is preparing the way for the new, the coming social system within the shell of the old. And all the tricks that this present old system has in its bag cannot and will not save it.