

## COMMENDABLES

### Holy Water for the Rich

**Bernard Murchland: *The Dream of Christian Socialism*;** American Enterprise Institute; Washington, D.C.

by Richard A. Cooper

Christianity and socialism exert tremendous influence in our world. Not surprisingly, some people have sought to harness these powerful forces together in one unified engine of change. Today, we hear talk of a "Christian social conscience" and "liberation theology." Bernard Murchland's examination of the European origins of Christian Socialism is surprisingly relevant for contemporary observers.

How did Christian Socialists view themselves? Their cardinal tenet is the identification of "socialism" (very loosely defined) with the message of Jesus Christ, especially the Sermon on the Mount. In the words of the Anglican theologian Frederick Denison Maurice, "I seriously believe that Christianity is the only foundation of Socialism, and that a true Socialism is the necessary result of a sound Christianity."

Common to Christian Socialists was a romantic rejection of industrialism, rationalism, and capitalism as anti-Christian. Against the modern world, Christian Socialists praised the collectivist order of the Middle Ages as one which offered security, personal relations, and a spiritual life in the service of God. Christian Socialists scorned individualism as idolatrous.

Murchland demonstrates that Christian Socialism was essentially

a middle-class and aristocratic movement, though "Christian labor unions" grew out of it. This fact did not escape Marx's notice and scorn. He observed, "Christian socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat."

Towards the end of the 19th century, Christian Socialism did exert some influence in Germany, Austria, and Italy, upon intellectuals and through Christian labor unions on the political scene. American "Progressivism" drew some inspiration from German and English sources under the name of the "social gospel." Economist Richard T. Ely was a devout Protestant layman, mixing collectivism with evangelical fervor.

Christian Socialism stressed "association" and "community," endowing these terms with mystical and suprarational characteristics of goodness, above comprehension and beyond dispute. These ideas owed a great deal to Hegel, whose statist doctrines received wide support in authoritarian Imperial Germany.

Like all collectivisms, Christian Socialism subordinated the individual to the interests of a real or imagined "whole." Strangely, Murchland takes no notice of the strong linkage between Christian Socialism and anti-Semitism exemplified by Christian Socialist Karl Lueger, mayor of Vienna. Nor does Murchland investigate the tendency towards nationalism of some Christian Socialists. I suggest that the driving force behind Christian

Socialist anti-Semitism was the hatred of money, a subject thoroughly investigated by Georg Simmel and S. Herbert Frankel.

In practice, Christian Socialism proved to be a party label for interventionism, and it is subject to the same critique of interventionism leveled by Ludwig von Mises: It distorts the dynamic process of the market to the detriment of consumers. □

### Shaving the Monkey

**Stephen R. L. Clark: *The Nature of the Beast: Are Animals Moral?*;** Oxford University Press; New York.

"Man," Mark Twain once declared, "is a species somewhere between the angels and the French." Our place in nature was a subject for discussion long before Darwin, although evolutionists often try to give the impression that mankind had to wait for a Victorian biologist to reveal the fact of our animal nature. In fact, Linnaeus (following a tradition as old as Aristotle) located man squarely at the apex of his *scala naturae*, just one step above the apes. The general opinion of philosophers—Stoic, Aristotelian, Thomist—was that man was a natural creature, an animal, who had been specially endowed with the gifts of reason and moral conscience. The great question has always been: how wide is the gulf which separates man from his nearest cousins and, therefore, from the rest of the animal kingdom? Two extreme positions are possible: the Cartesian view, that everything distinctly human lies in the soul, that animals are mere animated machines; and the naturalist view, that man is nothing more than an animal, an ape that has happened to evolve a rather

large brain.

The political alignments on this question are not always predictable. Fundamentalist Christians are in the Cartesian camp and argue that it is fruitless to discuss man's mammalian heritage: our species is a special creation designed for a particular purpose. The fundamentalists are reinforced by social scientists, usually non-Christian leftists, who maintain that culture and society are unique to man; comparisons with other species can only be misleading. On the other hand, political conservatives (often Christians in their private lives) are naturally inclined to find their views ratified in the natural order of things. The strangest set of contradictions is presented by Stephen Clark: a socialist and feminist of some sort, an Aristotelian and a theist, he adopts the typically English *via media* (if Clark is a Scot, I beg his forgiveness): human nature is a development—cultural, intellectual, and moral—of instinctual patterns that show up in other mammals:

I make no secret that my own vote falls with those who would deny a radical division between 'men' and 'beasts.' . . . The almost universal judgment of mankind has been that animals do indeed show love, devotion, righteous anger, shame, that they are governed in part by laws, instinctive and learned. It is natural law that parents care for their children, spare their defeated clan-mates . . . Perhaps the roots of ethical concern were here, and from such natural concern for our defenseless young, or unwillingness to savage our fellows, the moral systems of mankind were raised.

Clark explores the natural basis for human intelligence, free will, personal identity, and ethics. As a philosopher—do not be misled by the subject, Clark is

the real thing—he frames his subject between an analysis of underlying theories and assumptions and a discussion of the social and political consequences. At his best, Clark is a brilliant philosopher of science, a theoretical anthropologist. Unfortunately, he is all too often a victim to his prejudices: animal rights, socialism, and feminism. His most obsessive hobbyhorse is the morality of animals. It is possible to agree with him that natural law is really natural or that animals should not be subjected to painful and often silly experiments without at the same time putting on the rose-colored glasses of the animal moralist. Few of us are inclined to accept the moral freedom of wolves or the ability of chimpanzees to engage in abstract thought.

As a socialist, Clark feels compelled to belittle his natural allies, ethologists and sociobiologists, because their conclusions are often used to reinforce the right. In fact, many of Clark's most sensible points have already been made by E. O. Wilson or Richard Dawkins, whose views and arguments he reduces to caricatures. The most peculiar part of this ideologizing is that Clark is not a very good socialist, much less a doctrinaire Marxist. He concedes, as part of human nature, some respect for private property and the need to show deference to superiors. In fact, his utopian socialist vision brings him much closer to the contributors of *I'll Take My Stand* than to the editors of *The Nation*—more Chesterton than Tony Benn to use a British analogy.

Clark's most peculiar perversion is his announced feminism. His repeated condemnations of "patriarchalism" as the source of human evil is all the more curious because he never defines what he means by patriarchy and never confronts the anthropological or biological evidence for the universal pattern of male

dominance. But if all these irrational prejudices are stripped



away, we are left with a brilliant and systematic exploration of what it means to be a human animal. Unlike so many animal rights people, Clark does not write out of contempt for his own species. It would be more fair to say that his affections spill over and trickle down the steps of nature's ladder.

What are we, then, "slaves of God or naked apes"? Clark's answer is cautious:

My own belief is that we are mammals, and part of the flock of God: my anthropology has its roots in both biology and religion. . . . Affection towards clan-mates, love of children, deference to authority, disinclination to kill those who have reminded us of common humanity, even some respect for property: these features of human life do not, it seems, stem from our intellectual gifts.

The implications for human social life are obvious. The "natural affections" are at the root of our social life. If we are sociable by nature, then are we not also—in Aristotle's phrase—political animals—creatures programmed to live in small-scale communities which are the family writ large? Clark has reservations about the male-dominated Greek *polis* of Aristotelian philosophy, but he shares with the Greek a vision of "a form of society that stretches

further even than an extended family." Such a conception of society sheds light on the old problem of social control. If old-fashioned liberals and libertarians want to reduce the state to a set of free individualists, how can they ensure that their children will be raised to prefer freedom? How, that is, can they maintain their freedom without imposing authority? Clark suggests that only a recovery of "mutual affections" in small communities can guarantee the survival of free society:

Aristotelian political theory, suitably informed by ethological data concerning the likely bases of ethical sentiment, may offer us a

route between the advocates of State power in its modern form and individualistic libertarians.

An Aristotelian revival of this sort might succeed in creating an ideal materialist state but no Aristotelian—and certainly no Christian—can rest content. The good city exists for more than material well-being: It aims at the happiness of good men. For a good man to be happy, his life must be directed toward the good-in-itself, toward transcendence. In the end, the crack between man and nature must be broadened by the recognition of God, who compels us—and us alone—to judge our natural sentiments by a higher law. (TF) □

## Crows on the Barn Roof

Janet Beeler Shaw: *Some of the Things I Did Not Do*; University of Illinois Press; Urbana and Chicago.

The gulf between readable popular fiction and unreadable serious fiction has widened (and deepened) in recent years, to an almost uncrossable chasm. Writers trying to bridge the abyss from either direction have a habit of sinking out of sight. For all his many virtues, James Jones could not be taken seriously by the critics—he was just too damn entertaining—while Gore Vidal's efforts to be "experimental" have only succeeded in alienating his considerable Book-of-the-Month Club readership. However, one promising sign is the emergence of Janet Beeler Shaw as a major proposition in American short fiction. Shaw's stories are as readable as a good mystery, but they are also a good deal more serious than most of what passes for important writing.

The stories in Shaw's first collection are a series of glimpses

into the lives of ordinary people. Her characters are neither desperate loners nor bored housewives. They are not, thank heavens, writers and artists. Her world is inhabited by a young unwed mother who calls Dial-a-Prayer just to hear the voice of the priest she has fallen in love with, a divorced father who takes his son hiking in the mountains, a young man who finds himself committed—almost against his will—to marrying an anorexic. Although each of the tales is a study in crisis, they are brought off with a poise and sense of restraint which avoids the slightest hint of melodrama.

The most striking feature of this collection is the variety of characters. Each one is so well-conceived, so clearly sketched that the reader is convinced that Shaw is writing disguised autobiography. Her people seem to come in unmatched pairs, like the simple college jock and his expressive and arty wife who say things like, "I love the way you're sharing yourself with me." When