

**The Real Religion of Jesus Christ:
Letter to a Michigan Prison Inmate
(December 16, 1914)**

Terre Haute, Ind., Dec. 16, 1914.

Inmate No. 9756, Jackson, Mich.

My Dear Brother:—

I do not know who you are but I have read your Christmas letter and I send you my greeting with my heart in it.¹ You may be a convict, but you are my brother and when your message came to me I was touched to tears.

There is more to the real religion of Jesus Christ in the spirit you breathe out to the world from behind your cruel prison bars than in all of the orthodox sermons ever preached. You love the little children even as He loved them and you are in prison, while He was crucified. It is well that you are patient and forgiving. The world moves slowly. It may still be said: “They know not what they do.”²

You had the misfortune to be born in a world not yet civilized. Jesus loved the erring into righteousness. His professed followers shut them out from God’s sunlight and torture them into degeneracy and crime. The erring did not make themselves. Got made them. Let Him judge them.

The society that sent you to prison devours its own offspring. Thousands of little children are starved, stunted, and ground into dividends in the mills of mammon. It is the Christian society’s homeless, neglected babes to whom you, one of its condemned convicts, feel moved to send the pennies coined from your own blood and agony. What a sermon and what a rebuke!

If you ought to be in a penitentiary I know of not one who ought to be out.

Believe me with heart and hand, your brother and fellow-man,

Eugene V. Debs.

¹ Debs read an article in the December 15 edition of the *Terre Haute Tribune* reprinting the cover letter of a Michigan prison inmate sent with a \$2 gift to a “Good Fellow Club” to buy toys for underprivileged children, a project coordinated by a Detroit newspaper. Debs was moved by the gift to respond with this letter.

² From *Luke 23:34*, quoting Jesus from the cross.