

FINANCIAL CONTROL AND BIRTH CONTROL

DE nominibus non est curandum is one of those trite sayings of St. Thomas which, outside its context, could easily be gravely misunderstood. He is blaming those who concern themselves more with words than with the realities which words are meant to represent. Words are only signs, and the sign without the reality loses its reason of being. It is a sign-post which points to a place that does not exist.

There is abundant reason for thinking that the implicit criticism contained in these words of St. Thomas is especially applicable to modern times when men seem so strongly attached to words and symbols, and delude themselves into thinking that they possess the realities because they have the words. Democracy, efficiency and rationalisation are words to juggle with, though the realities they stand for seem to be very conspicuous by their absence. Indeed, you can never take for granted what the users of these words mean by them. A request for definitions is always worth while.

This modern fetichism for mere words and signs is most evident in the outstanding fact that money, which was invented to be a sign of real wealth, is now held as wealth *par excellence*, and is the measure of all things, the stern controller of our lives and destinies. It decides our rank in society; it decides whether we are to work for our bread or to live on the labours of others, whether we are to be fed or to starve, whether we are to live or to die—nay, whether we are to be born: for not only are millions of possible children denied the benefit of mere existence because parents complain that they have not enough of this thing called money, but those who control the money are now trying to decide under what conditions parents

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are to be allowed to bring children into the world. If compulsory sterilisation becomes law, it will only be the outcome of the present trend of things. Except for the rich, birth-control is an economic problem.

Such is the power of money, a bit of metal or paper covered with marks (often not even that, for in modern times money exists in the form of credit, which is a mere fiction of the mind), a thing which is of practically no value in itself, cannot be eaten or drunk, and is hardly fine enough to serve as an ornament—a mere sign or symbol. That is what it was first invented for, a symbol of things of real value and utility, like bread and butter and shoes, invented to facilitate trade or exchange of goods. But nowadays it frequently fails even in this its essential and original character; for money is often a sign which does not represent any reality at all outside the minds of the men who trade with it. It sometimes happens that great numbers of people are brought to poverty by the manipulation of money on a Stock Exchange when there is no existing reality in the world represented by that money; and poverty, be it noted, is not fundamentally the lack of coin, but the lack of real things of use, food, clothing, housing and necessaries.

Further, with regard to the relation of money to realities, not only has it to a large extent ceased to serve the purpose for which it was intended, having become a sort of weapon in the hands of those who possess it in large quantities, by means of which they are able to control the lives and exploit the labour of others; but it is now becoming clearer and clearer that in the long run money-domination actually hinders and destroys that real wealth which is necessary for the support of life and enjoyment.

We should take it amiss if we were accused of despising the word of God; yet few indeed of us are persuaded of the truth of St. Paul's words to

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Timothy : ' The love of money is the root of all evils ' ; not some, but *all* (I Tim. vi, 10). It is one of those very uncomfortable texts which we like to explain in a spiritual sense or circumvent after the fashion of those who search Jerusalem anxiously for a gateway named The Eye of the Needle. That is a quest more difficult than looking for a needle in the proverbial haystack, for it is looking for a needle that is not there. St. Paul's words find their perfect justification in our own day, when terrible crimes against God and humanity result from this diabolical system of financial control of society. It behoves us all to see how far we are implicated in and responsible for these evils.

The idea of responsibility is a thing not much in fashion owing to the contempt for human reason in these days of rationalisation. The attempt to prove that man evolved from the animal seems to have led to the belief that men and women are not much better than animals after all ; hence natural inclination is to be followed without any reference to reason or responsibility. To what but that, in the last resort, are to be traced the cult of divorce and birth-prevention ? Parallel with the idea of pleasure without responsibility runs the idea of business without personal responsibility. For the modern tendency is to limit and destroy personal relationships and individual responsibility in work and business by substituting the impersonal company for the individual master who can be seen and held accountable for both work and workman. This merging of businesses is called by the name of rationalisation, though it is manifestly the opposite. For if rationalisation means anything at all, it ought to mean the introduction of reason and intelligence into the arrangement of things ; but the first effect of reason and intelligence is personal responsibility, and personal responsibility means moral

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responsibility. Every single thing that happens in this world as the result of the use of human intelligence and will has to be answered for by someone or other; we cannot all shirk the responsibility.

Now personal responsibility is not removed or destroyed by the mere fact of turning a number of individual businesses into a company or a combine. This personal and moral responsibility remains the same whether there is one master or three-hundred shareholders. If this were remembered, we should examine more carefully the sources from which we receive the money with which we obtain the means of life and enjoyment. That much responsibility, at any rate, lies upon us all. It certainly does not suffice to shelve the matter by saying that we have handed our capital over to investments, classing all investments together as though all were beyond reproach.

When it comes to the question of moral responsibility the conditions under which dividends are produced is a vital question. In spite of the shibboleth that money makes money, it still remains a fact that all real wealth is produced only by the labour of some human being. Unworked coal at the bottom of the pit is not real wealth; it becomes real wealth after the rather terrible labours of the coal-miner have brought it to the top. It is necessary, then, for the dividend-receiver to ask some searching questions about the work which produces the dividends. Is it moral or immoral work? Am I sure my dividends are not received from chemical companies which manufacture and sell contraceptives and similar articles? Have I ascertained that I am not living on profits made by slave-labour or sweated industries or fictitious and fraudulent companies? Recent events show how real are these questions. Unfortunately, the answer to them will most often be that we do not know, nor does there seem to be any means of finding out. Besides,

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no one bothers. But if we are talking of moral responsibility, we ought to know and we ought to find out before we dare to use the money provided by dividends. Perhaps we are living on money produced by crime and terrible injustice.

If it be pleaded in justification that it is quite impossible in the modern system of invested capital for the investor to follow up his money and examine the conditions under which it is used for profit, then we reply with vehemence that the whole system stands condemned by all moral standards. For according to the teaching of St. Thomas one of the conditions under which it is lawful to accept interest on money is the sharing of the risks and responsibilities of the work which produces the interest. We have long been persuaded that here we put our finger on the great festering sore of modern society, which is the root of most of the other social and moral evils from which we are suffering. This disregard of serious responsibilities in the matter of justice could have only one result, and all suggested remedies for social and moral betterment are barren as the wind while we leave that evil unremedied. The trouble is that we are all bound up in the system, Catholics and non-Catholics, clerics and laity, religious, contemplative and active; and a great deal of courage is needed to admit the reality of the evil and the inevitableness of the remedy.

Such a system is possible only in a society where money is made the measure, arbiter and controller. How complete is this control will be seen from a few details which anyone can find out who reads news and not newspapers. They prove how alien to God and His designs is the financial control of the world (its proper name is Mammon). It is a fundamental truth of Christianity and of the Natural Law that God gave the earth and its fruits for the benefit, without dis-

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crimination on His part, of the human race which it had pleased Him to place on the earth. His final blessing was : Increase and multiply. It seems strange to have to insist on God's intelligence, but it is necessary in order to persuade some that it may be taken for granted that God would always see to it that the supply of the good things of the earth would keep pace with the multiplication of the children of men. Now in both these things, the multiplication of the race and the increase of food, the mammon-worshippers have set themselves up against God. The financial power which bestrides the world like a brazen Colossus has not only kept food off the market in order to keep up prices at a time when millions are living near the line of starvation, but it has actually restricted the production of food for the same purpose. This is another form of rationalisation, for according to Lord Melchett rationalisation is the organised limitation of output—the very converse of what we see in the operations of God and Nature. He wraps it up in nice words which may hoodwink the simple-minded, and defines rationalisation as ' the rational control of industry to ensure that, as far as possible, you do not produce more than your market can absorb.' And what is the measure of what your market can absorb? It is simply the amount of money possessed by the buyers in the market. Probably half the people in this country alone could absorb twice as much goods in the form of food, shelter and clothing as at present they are able to enjoy with the limited money at their disposal. There are two ways of enabling them to absorb more goods; lowering the price or providing them with more money; but there you touch the problem in its crudest form. The chief problem of modern industry is the division of profits between the wage-earners and the share-holders; if wages rise, dividends fall, and *vice versa*. But how many share-

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holders take seriously their personal responsibility of ensuring that the very first charge upon the industry should be that those who have produced the profits by their labour receive a living wage? And a living wage is not a mere subsistence wage, but 'a workman's wages should be sufficient to enable him to maintain himself, his wife, and his children in reasonable comfort, for it is just and right that the results of labour should belong to those who have bestowed their labour' (*Rerum Novarum*, 49 and 11).

To fight against birth-control propaganda without attacking vigorously the economic conditions which provide the proximate occasions of this sin is simply beating the air; for financial control is not only the indirect cause of the spread of this evil, but there is reason to believe that it directly encourages the evil for its own advantage. A month ago, at a meeting held at Westminster, Mr. H. Wright, the editor of *The Nation*, and therefore a person of influence and responsibility, declared that he considered birth-control was a discovery (*sic*) 'as important as the invention of printing or the use of electricity.' After that any further remarks of the editor of *The Nation* might well be neglected as of no importance; but he went on to say: 'The birth-rate was the lowest ever recorded, and he rejoiced that it was still falling. Population was still increasing too rapidly for our resources.' The last sentence is the important one.

Now Mr. Wright, as editor of *The Nation*, cannot possibly be in ignorance of what is going on in the world. He saw, for instance, that the Food Council recently condemned the Bakers' Association in the strongest terms for putting up the price of bread when there was no justification for it except the desire of gain, and when the granaries of America are bursting with wheat. He knows better than we know that the financiers who control the wheat pools are

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deliberately holding up the great wheat supplies in order to keep up the price. Indeed, we are ready to believe that they would destroy the stocks of food, were it not that this would cost more than does the preserving of them. That this is not a rash judgment is proved by known facts concerning the deliberate destruction of food in order to keep it off the market where it would bring down prices. Fish is thrown back into the sea or left to rot in large quantities. Food rots in the fields while outrageous prices are demanded in the shops. And it is all done on a diabolical principle, a principle of rationalisation, that the short market produces the highest profits. Think, on the one hand, of the half-starved multitudes and, on the other, of those who live on dividends produced by investments in wheat.

Those who read newspapers intelligently cannot fail to have noted the great disturbances which have occurred during the past two years on the money markets owing to the abundant crops of wheat which God has been bestowing on the world. He alone knows how necessary it is. But the wheat controllers became extremely pessimistic and expressed the fear, according to *The Observer*, that the only thing that could save them from ruin was a world shortage. The prospect of another bumper crop was so terrifying that the rationalisers have taken measures to prevent such a calamity by ordering the farmers of America to cut down their wheat acreage. It is an order that few would dare to refuse, for disobedience would be followed by a refusal of credit from the banks, and it is the banks which control the whole situation. The same process is said to have been put into force in the production of cotton, wool, sugar, and raisins. And the editor of *The Nation* looks wise and solemnly says that we are increasing faster than our resources, hence the necessity of birth-prevention, because sup-

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plies are running short. They *are* running short, and dangerously so. A recent article in *The Times* by Sir W. Haldane on cattle production showed the following figures :

In the U.S.A. cattle dropped from 68,000,000 in 1920 to 58,000,000 in 1928; in Australia numbers fell twenty per cent. in six years; parallel statistics for Canada and New Zealand. As for our own country, the official returns for 1928 showed a decrease of 250,000 cattle and 700,000 sheep in one year; and the land is falling out of cultivation at an incredible speed—416,000 acres within two years!

As an example of how finance encourages birth-control propaganda by direct subsidy, we conclude with the following extract from *The New Age* of May 8th :

The most direct evidence that high finance definitely encourages birth-control is to be found in the last report of a body calling itself (we have forgotten the name) something like the National Association of Birth-Control Clinics. Inside the back page subscribers are informed that the Association has secured for them the privilege of being excused payment of income-tax on such of their income as they shall donate. The significance of this concession by the Treasury will be appreciated by our readers, who are now perfectly acquainted with the principles on which the Bankers' Government (through the Treasury) dispense such benefits. But we must say a word or two about its implications. The Secretary of the Association, after giving this information, makes an ingenious suggestion as to a method by which the subscribers can increase their financial gifts without paying out any more money. We can describe it most briefly by giving an illustration. Mr. A. has been giving £10 per annum. He can now increase this to, say, £12 10s. (nominal) by signing a special subscription form to that effect. He sends this, with his £10, to the Association. The Association will then recover from Somerset House on his behalf, say, four shillings in the pound on £12 10s.—namely, £2 10s. And there you are! The State has subsidised birth-control to that

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amount. Moreover, speaking of subsidies, and remembering that the orthodox objection to them is that since they have to be covered by taxation (in order that the Budget be balanced), they constitute a levy on the general public for the benefit of a particular interest; so in this case every tax-payer has to pay his proportionate share of the expense. The size of it is a matter of no importance—the Association's total income was, if we remember rightly, under £1,000—but we should say that there must be some millions of Catholics in this country who would strongly object on moral and spiritual grounds to paying any tax at all towards the subsidy in question.

The important point here is not to miss the significance of the fact that those behind the Birth-Control Clinics are able to exert such an influence over the Treasury.

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