

## THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL PROGRAMME

IT is only as the consequence of a misunderstanding that some seek for a detailed social policy in the encyclicals of the Popes. One must not expect to find in them a pronouncement in favour of protection or free trade, a discussion of various monetary systems with a decision in favour of one of them, or even an exhortation to introduce the Eight Hours working day. As Leo XIII and Pius XI have repeatedly said, their intervention in the field of social reconstruction is based entirely on their official duty to safeguard and promote religion and morality, both of which are necessarily involved in the organization of society. The Popes make no claim to be economists or financiers, still less to be engineers or agriculturists; but they do most emphatically claim the right to lay down the moral principles which must be respected by all classes of mankind, and to point out the forms assumed by those principles in relation to the political, economic, financial and technical organization of society. Those who complain that such encyclicals as Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* or Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* do not enter into greater detail would do better to reflect on this illustration of the Church's desire to leave as much liberty to individuals and States as she can without failing in her duty as guardian of the moral law. Given several alternative policies, any one of which may be pursued without any violation of morality, the Church is quite content to leave the choice between them to those who are entrusted with the care of national interests, or who have a part to play in the social mechanism by virtue of their economic functions. One is tempted to draw upon a military metaphor, and say that the Church lays down the strategy of social reconstruction, leaving the tactics in the hands of statesmen and others who are charged with the direction of the various factors of the social economy.

Like all strategy, the strategy of the Church is directed towards a victory, the victory of Christ in the world. In the

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social sphere this means the achievement of the common welfare, primarily spiritual, but **also** temporal welfare as instrumental to the good life. Needless to **say**, an abyss separates the Catholic conception of the common welfare of mankind from that of the Communists; the abyss which divides every spiritual philosophy of life from materialism. A full discussion of this point is outside an exposition of the positive social programme of the Church, but **one** must not lose sight of the fact that this programme is only a part of a much wider philosophy which it assumes as proved. **All** the obligations arising from the virtues of justice and charity, both individual and social, insisted on as **an** integral part of the programme, derive from principles established elsewhere. Similarly, the Communist strategy and tactics relating to the overthrow of Capitalism are based upon that wider point of view which is **so** familiar as 'the materialist conception of history.' From this comes the Communist advocacy of violent revolution, its demand for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the socialization of the means of production as steps towards a classless society.

Of **all** the differences which separate the Catholic programme from that of Marxists, perhaps the most fundamental is their attitude to class-distinctions. To a Marxist, class-distinctions **are** inevitably the source of exploitation, particularly **when** founded on the ownership of productive **property**. From this follows, **as** an inevitable corollary, the necessity of the class-war **as** the motive power in social evolution. In the Catholic programme, on the other hand, there is no hostility to class-distinctions **as** such, or even to the **private** ownership of productive property as such. Certain class-distinctions arise from the fact that men **naturally fall** into groups or classes according to the nature of the **work** they perform. There is a class-distinction between skilled engineers and unskilled labourers **as** much as between doctors and lawyers, soldiers and sailors. The Communist suggestion that in the perfect society all men will be engaged in **all** sorts of occupations seems to show hostility even to this form of class-distinction, whereas the

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Catholic programme advocates the juridic organization of such occupational groups. With regard to class-distinctions which carry with them *de jure* or *de facto* authority over other people, the Church is satisfied to press the old principle that there is no privilege and no power without responsibility. She has no sympathy with anarchism, even of the peaceful variety. Political authority, she holds, is a necessity for social welfare, and therefore willed by God; but it is of its very nature limited by the purpose for which it exists, the promotion of the temporal welfare of the community. Provided that a Government holds power by a just title, it has *de jure* authority; but it must not be forgotten that enormous power over the lives of others, enormous *de facto* authority, may be and is held by individuals and groups who have no *de jure* political authority at all. Sometimes this *de facto* power is founded on an entirely illegitimate title, as in the case of the political usurper, the racketeer or the blackmailer. But the Popes are not prepared to admit that the *de facto* authority or power which arises from the ownership of productive property is necessarily illegitimate. The ownership of almost any sort of property gives power to the owner, even if it be merely purchasing power; but the ownership of productive property gives the dangerous power to direct and control the lives of other men, owing to their inescapable need to draw upon natural resources (such as the land), or at any rate to obtain their livelihood by hiring out their labour power to those who own the means of production. In *Quadragesimo Anno* Pius XI shows himself much concerned with this problem of economic dictatorship, the desire for which, as he remarks, has supplanted the old lust for mere profit. He admits that its dangers are so great as to justify the State, in certain circumstances, nationalizing some forms of productive property, but he refuses to accept the socialist 'solution'—the practically universal nationalization of the means of production. This remedy he regards as worse than the disease it is intended to cure. It delivers the individual and the family into the hands of the State, already too prone to Totalitarianism, and its result would

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be to saddle the State with cares and responsibilities beyond its resources and outside its proper function. The function of the State, which is but the community organized for the purpose of doing as a whole what its members cannot do for themselves, is to safeguard the rights of the citizens at home and abroad and to supplement by the organized resources of the community the private efforts of individuals and groups to achieve temporal welfare by legitimate means. To supplant those private efforts altogether would lead to manifold evils, and is a sign of impatience and political bankruptcy rather than of wisdom.

Obviously this is by no means the same as saying that the State should content itself with an attitude of *laissez faire*, a political doctrine which the Popes have repeatedly repudiated and condemned. The State has very important and very active functions to fulfil, and it will fulfil them the more efficiently the less it tries to exceed them. Watchful supervision lest any class of its citizens be exploited, including of course just retribution to malefactors of all sorts, and carefully considered assistance and stimulus to the various branches of social activity, are quite enough to keep those who hold political authority fully occupied, more especially in our modern industrialized communities. Factory legislation and Shops Acts, limiting hours of labour, regulating the employment of married women, young persons and children, and tending to secure healthy conditions (morally as well as physically) in places of employment, are in full accord with the Catholic programme. So too are Trade Boards, established to abolish sweating in unorganized industries, where trade unionism is weak.

But the unorganized industry is not in accordance with our programme. On the economic plane the unorganized industry is what the unorganized community is on the political plane. It is a form of anarchy, with all its dangers and weaknesses. Custom in this country seems to limit the appellation of 'unorganized' to those trades and industries in which trade unionism is either very weak or non-existent, but it is evident that this usage is far too narrow. It is an eloquent testimony to the impression made by

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trade unionism on minds nourished on *laissez faire*, but it gives a wrong impression of the state of an industry in which there may be no effective organization of the representatives of capital, and no method to enable the industry to speak with one voice or to administer its corporate affairs effectively. The Catholic social programme has always, from the early days of the Catholic social movement, advocated trade unionism, even at a time when the Governments of the newly industrialized countries opposed and forbade it. Leo XIII gave trade unionism official approbation. Pius XI, repeating that approbation, urges a parallel organization of employers. The obvious danger of such organizations is that they may face one another like two armies ready for battle, and it is vitally necessary to provide a method for bringing them into peaceful contact with each other. The Whitley Scheme of Joint Industrial Councils provided such a method, and the letter of the Sacred Congregation of the Council to the Bishop of Lille (1929), which has been published as a twopenny pamphlet by the Catholic Social Guild under the title *Trade Unions and Employers' Associations*, quotes an instruction given by Cardinal Gasparri in 1915, a year before the Whitley Committee was appointed, to the following effect:

It is most opportune, useful and in conformity with Christian principles, to continue, as far as may be practicable, the simultaneous establishment of separate unions for employers and for workers, while creating, as a point of contact between them, joint committees entrusted with the duty of discussing and settling in a peaceful manner, in accordance with justice and charity, the disagreements that may spring up between the members of the respective unions.

When this has been done, it may be said that the first stage of organization has been accomplished. But something still remains to be done. Provision has been made for discussions between trade unions and employers' associations, but the industry as a whole cannot be regarded as a social entity with a moral personality unless it has powers of self-government, subject of course to the ultimate supervision of the State on behalf of the community. A fully organized

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industry therefore requires juridic personality, which it can receive only from the legislature. Having this, it would be able to own property as an individual can. It could establish a fund for the maintenance of its own unemployed, for example, and for the assistance of those members of the industry who for one reason or another fell into distress. It could govern itself by means of a council representative of all the interests engaged in the industry, with power to override a recalcitrant minority. It could regulate prices and thus abolish unfair competition. It could determine standard conditions of labour for all the firms comprised in the industry.

This is not the place to discuss the obstacles in the way of this reconstruction, but it must be remarked that an organization of this sort retains all the social advantages of individualism without its dangers, and secures that social control of the national economy which is generally admitted to be necessary. Nor must it be thought that the Catholic social movement has borrowed this idea from Fascism. On the contrary, Fascism is the borrower. In the borrowing, however, it has introduced serious changes into the Catholic plan, for the Fascist theory of the totalitarian State is intolerant of that industrial self-government which logically follows from the Catholic philosophy of society as a community of communities.

Pope Pius XI, in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, points out many weaknesses in the social structure of our modern societies. He stresses the social character of the institution of private property, as against the individualistic view of it, reminding property owners that they cannot always do what they like with 'their own.' He reminds the world that labour, too, has both a social and an individual aspect, and that to neglect either aspect is to be led into false theories about the distribution of the product of industry. To demand wages excessively high will have repercussions harmful not only to the community as a whole, but to the workers themselves. That is a truth which has been readily seized by all who have to pay wages and by many who receive them. But it is no less a truth that

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the old policy of paying labour only what it could be forced to accept is equally disastrous to society as well as to the workers. Pius XI, in particular, makes it clear that Leo XIII, in demanding as a natural right the payment of at least a living wage, was referring to a minimum wage sufficient to maintain a normal family, and to build up a reserve of property.

But he is not content to suggest that the weaknesses in our social structure should be repaired by patching. Central to his whole scheme of social re-building is the idea of the organized industry, in the sense developed above. In the light of this, his advocacy of 'the modification of the wage-contract by a contract of partnership' takes on a fuller significance. So does his insistence on the co-operation of capital and labour, a co-operation which he desires should pass from the order of economic fact to that of the intellect and will under the stimulus and protection of appropriate legislative provisions. The individual aspect of capital and that of labour afford no point of contact between capitalists and workers, but this is provided by their social aspects, which involve mutual obligations, and which should be recognized and sanctioned by juridic organization. Given a corporate organization of industry, the State, supreme in all matters relating to its province, could exercise the functions we have already discussed more effectively than at present. It is not surprising, then, that Catholic statesmen like Herr Dollfuss have determined to put the recommendations of Pius XI into execution, or that thoughtful industrialists in Great Britain and the United States are adopting the idea of some sort of corporate organization. It is for us Catholics to do our best to secure that the new form of organization when it comes (as it assuredly will) is in harmony with the general principles of the encyclicals.

Much has been said in this paper of institutional reform; **but** this is only one part of the social reconstruction advocated **by** the Popes. An equally important part is moral regeneration, which in this context means especially a revival of the spirit of social justice and social charity. Institutions

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must be vivified by the Christian spirit; otherwise they are but dead machinery. All the members of a State must be inspired, not merely by the desire to advance their own interests, but also by the firm resolve to respect the rights of others and to promote their welfare. The inculcation of this Christian spirit is primarily the office of the Church, and, hampered though she is by the defection of those who have fallen away from her and by the indolence or sinfulness of those of her members who neglect her teachings, she will do her part to the utmost of her ability. Furthermore, as Pius XI reminds us, she has many unconscious allies outside her ranks, people who strive after the Kingdom of God and His justice, 'spiritual forcers of unexpected strength, a dear testimony of a "naturally Christian soul"' (*Quadragesimo Anno*), forces which will prove too strong for materialism, whether individualist or communist, to subdue.

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