

RESTORATION—HOW?

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OME time ago, in fact nearly two thousand years ago, a man named Paul wrote a long letter to some friends and co-workers in the city of Corinth. Those were times full of trouble and Paul was afflicted with more than his share of it. Yet in his zeal for the welfare of his friends he had little thought for self-commiseration. Briefly he describes conditions: "In all things we suffer tribulation but we are not distressed; we are straitened but we are not destitute."¹ Could the workingman of our own time, splendid and courageous as he is, find better words to describe his condition, to voice the hope that sometime his state will improve?

We too live in troubled times. We need but look to see on every hand disorganization, failure and an almost complete collapse of those very institutions we ourselves have been building and striving to perfect. If our efforts to secure material well-being had brought results commensurate with the energy expended, we should indeed have times of plenty. Instead we have widespread poverty and want. We should have a complete and intelligent control over those creatures of our genius, machines. Instead, the machine, in a very real sense, is the "master of its maker." We should have order, contentment, peace. Actually we find confusion, unrest and strife.

Why have we failed so miserably in our attempt to make good use of the things God gave us? Why this grossly unfair distribution of the world's goods? Why the constant warfare between worker and employer, employer and investor, investor and government? The more frequently these questions are asked, the more numerous are the causes assigned. We hear them everywhere: free trade—excessive tariff—over-production—unwise planning in production—faulty credit system—too many laws—not enough laws; their superficiality well nigh exceeds their multiplicity. Heaven help the patient, the diagnosis of whose case is similar to the "experts'" diagnosis of our present day social maladies. He may well decide to lay himself down and die.

There must be a more radical cause of this disorder than those commonly adduced. There *is* a more radical cause and we take the

¹ II. Cor. iv, 8.

word "radical" in its primary sense of "pertaining to the root"; that is, there is a *fundamental* cause. A principle in use among thinkers for centuries may be summed up in this fashion: whatever is found in an effect must be found also, in some manner, in that which produced the effect. Thus in a good landscape painting there is present a certain balance and proportion. These qualities are nothing more than effects of a well-ordered plan in the artist's mind during the production of his work. But in the problem with which we are here concerned this relation of cause to effect is even more evident than in the illustration. What precisely is the radical defect in our social order? Briefly,—an almost total lack of any spiritual dominion in material affairs! The fundamental cause of this defect therefore is the failure to subordinate the material order to the spiritual, an inordinate insistence upon and absorption with material progress without proper recognition of the spiritual values involved. This is no superficial attribution. Here is the weakness of our social system traced not to one or another of its fruits but to its very roots. President Roosevelt indicates his recognition of a spiritual deficiency when he says: "The people of America are turning as never before to those permanent values that are not limited to the physical objectives of life."

We have stated that the fundamental cause of our present social disorder is the failure to subordinate the material order to the spiritual. At first sight this statement may seem to be vague and purely theoretical. On the contrary, it is the expression of a most conspicuous fact. During the establishment of our present economic order the doctrines of Materialism and Rationalism had a far-reaching influence. Consequently, our present system was influenced in its formation by these principles which were utterly alien to the true moral law and to true Christian teaching on social justice. Belief in life after death was either rejected or ignored. Quite logically, therefore, there arose a materialistic idea which regarded temporal advantages and material prosperity as the final end of all effort.

But let us return to the letter which the workingman Paul wrote to his coworkers in Corinth. The contents of this letter are not confined to Paul's complaint. As we read we perceive a strong man's faith in his power with the help of God to conquer and to bring order out of disorder. As Paul had his hope, so too has the workingman of today the hope to bring justice, social and economic, into a world which no longer recognizes the very meaning of the word justice!

Just as in the assignment of the cause of the present disorder we had to discard many superficial explanations, so also in seeking a remedy we must reject those restoratives, which, while they may give new life to some of the fruit, are impotent to cure the disease of the plant at its root. Neglect the infection in the root, the source of strength and growth, and the tree will never bear healthy and abundant fruit. Curtailment of production—creation of an increased demand—reevaluation of currency—stringent financial regulation,—all these and the other stock proposals are inadequate since they are not directed at the source of the trouble. It cannot be repeated too emphatically that the disease is of a spiritual nature. Therefore the remedy must be likewise spiritual. The material progress has been made; the spiritual advance must now overtake its truant subject and proceed to exercise its natural dominion.

Where are we to find the true solution? Certainly it must come from a spiritual source but that source must be true. In fact the deterioration in our appreciation of true values, that is, failure to subordinate an inferior order to its superior, was due in a large measure to the falsity of a certain spiritual standard which had attained a considerable acceptance. We refer to a tenet proposed by a religious group whose outlook was distorted by a misunderstanding of the doctrine concerning predestination: an abundance of material goods is a sign of spiritual progress; to be blessed with plenty is to be the recipient of a real benediction, is to be numbered among the elect of God. The consequences of such a doctrine are obvious. It is, therefore, necessary that we search diligently for a *true* spiritual solution. Again, where is it to be found? The Catholic Church which makes the astounding claim that she possesses the one God-given truth ought to have something to offer. She has! Is her solution sound in principle? Is it practical? The remedy proposed by the Catholic Church is a radical one, sound, reasonable and eminently practical.

Since our doctrine on social justice is more reasonable it will be well to begin where reason dictates, namely, with a few general notions which are concerned with the very foundations of our social structure.

Man is a creature composed of body and soul and is destined for an eternal existence. But before he can begin that eternal life with God, he must live his life here on earth in a satisfactory manner. By his very nature he can best do that, not alone, but in the company of other men,—in society. As St. Thomas expresses it: "For every man needs first the divine assistance secondly even human assistance

since man is naturally a social animal."² In this community life certain relations obtain between him and the other individuals of the group, between the individual and society as a whole. Without losing his identity as a person, he must take an equal interest in his own good and the good of the community. The purpose of his life, although it assumes an added function, a social character, still retains its ordination to the one end of personal sanctification. For what other purpose does social life serve but to assure the "exterior tranquillity so necessary to contemplation"? In St. Thomas we find a development of this idea: "So that, properly considered, all the activities of human life seem to be in the service of those who contemplate the truth."³ The better to insure this material welfare, man must have constant dealings with his fellow men. Work, play and prayer, all are done better in common. In primitive society these contacts were of a simple character; in time they became more and more complex until we now have a labyrinth of business, political and social relationships.

Here then is the basis for the sensible and efficacious remedy proposed by the Catholic Church and embodied in the Encyclical Letter "Quadregesimo Anno" of the present pope, Pius XI.

To start again with man's very nature, the right to possess land, chattel or the fruits of his labor is a natural right, staunchly upheld by the Church. Provision is also made in the Church's plan for the right to increase one's possessions to that degree where a goodly measure of comfort and security is had. For as St. Thomas explains: "Material goods are necessary as instruments to the external acts of virtue."⁴ These material goods are necessary not for a chosen few but for *everyone*,—necessary not for their own sake but only as a means to help man in fulfilling his own destiny. We have here an excellent example of the Church's recognition of the true and proper order of values. At least in practice our present economic system makes the assumption that industry exists for the sake of money. This is a direct inversion of the true economic doctrine that money exists for industry and trade. The Church in her valuation assigns to money its proper role, namely, a *medium of exchange* to feed industry not to stifle it. Likewise on the relation of wealth to the individual the Church has a very definite stand which is succinctly ex-

² *Summa Theol.* II-II q. 129, a. 6, ad 3.

³ *Summa contra Gentiles*, iii, 37.

⁴ *Summa Theol.* II-II q. 134, a. 3, ad 4.

pressed in these Thomistic principles: "A man's social state should be measured by his service to the commonwealth; a man's state in life is not determined by his wealth but his wealth should be determined by his service to society."⁵

With this right to acquire an equitable share of the world's goods there is a corresponding duty that "wealth superfluous to a man's state in life should be distributed." In other words: "The temporal goods which God grants us are ours as to ownership. But as to the use of them they belong not to us alone but to those whom we are able to help out of what we have over and above our needs."⁶ Closely linked with this obligation man has others,—to further his own spiritual progress, to provide a true Christian home for his family and to secure a Christian education for his children. In addition, he occupies an important place in society. Therefore, he must take an active part in securing the material and spiritual welfare of his country.

Here then *in principle* is the solution of our present social problem based on the proper subordination of the entire material order to the spiritual realm. Will the principles thus offered, if reduced to practice, bridge the distance between our material progress and our spiritual lethargy? Yes! The workingman of today, like Paul, is troubled but he is not distressed in spirit; he is not destitute of all hope for the future. He seeks eagerly for "a way out." By the formation of guilds composed, not of workers banded against employers, but of workers and employers alike; by the establishment of credit unions; by the formation of study groups among workingmen and among employers; and by divers other means we must show the American workingman the practicality, the efficacy of "our way."

Now as in every crisis in the past twenty centuries, the Catholic Church has something to offer. Hers is a radical reform, correct in principle and in application. With the acceptance of her prescribed principles, order will arise out of disorder, true social justice will replace the gross injustice of society as we know it. With renewed hope we will be able to say with the workingman Paul, "We are not distressed, we are not destitute."

⁵ *Irish Rosary*, Jan. 1935, p. 5.

⁶ *Summa Theol.* II-II q. 32, a. 5, ad. 2.