

## CHRIST'S AMBASSADOR TO THE MARKET PLACE

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"Like the zeal of Jesus described in Holy Scripture, the zeal of the priest for the glory of God and the salvation of souls ought to consume him. It should make him forget himself and all earthly things. It should powerfully urge him to dedicate himself utterly to his sublime work, and to search out means ever more effective for an apostolate ever wider and ever better."

Pope Pius XI *On the Priesthood*.

"For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting by us." (2 Cor. 5, 20).



ON JUNE 4, 1898, a man in his twenty-ninth year was ordained as an ambassador of Jesus Christ. Like every priest of the Catholic Church, John Augustine Ryan had been elevated from the ranks of men "to offer Sacrifice, to bless, to guide, to preach and to baptize." In November of 1900, while searching out "means ever more effective for an apostolate ever wider and ever better," he addressed himself to the market place of American commerce and industry. But his voice was unheard amidst the clamor of business. At the turn of the century, the unholy triumvirate of power, profits and politics reigned unchallenged over the market place. Business men found the service of Mammon more lucrative than the service of God. Even the workers had cast from their hearts the Christian Message of Hope. Dogged despair gnawed at their souls with even greater persistence than hunger wasted their bodies.

This new mediator between God and man saw the unrest among the masses of the market place and he longed to unite them under the standard of Christ. Forty-five years ago the market place did not recognize the voice of John A. Ryan. Today, his name is hailed as the symbol of the ideal American "liberal" whose wisdom brought not only hope to the underprivileged masses but actual comfort and relief from their suffering. For over a quarter of a century he has been acclaimed as an eminent sociologist, economist and social reformer.

But John A. Ryan himself would never allow the world to forget that he was first and always a priest. The sole aim of his life was very simple: the salvation of souls. For him, religious and moral ills were the direct causes of the social problems in the market place. And

those ills came from the human tenants of the market place. It was to fight for Christ, to win those souls for Christ that Father John A. Ryan elected to become an ambassador of Christ to the market place.

"At this moment the condition of the working population is the question of the hour; and nothing can be of higher interest to all classes of the State than it should be rightly and reasonably decided."

Pope Leo XIII *On the Condition of Labor*.

May 15, 1891, should have marked the beginning of a new era for the wage-earners of the market place. It is a date that should be enshrined in the heart of every laborer for it was to the laborer rather than to Labor that the Holy Pontiff, Pope Leo XIII spoke in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* or *On the Condition of Labor*. Although he had the care of all human souls—the souls of capitalists as well as of laborers—Pope Leo, as Christ's Vicar, chose to speak directly to the wage-earners. That his pronouncements failed to inaugurate a new era for them was perhaps due in no small measure to the richness of the reforms which he envisaged for the market place.

That the golden voice of Leo was not heard in the market place, or that his principles for reform were not understood was not the fault of John A. Ryan. His first meeting with the encyclical occurred three years after its publication, in 1894, and then quite by accident—as an assignment in postgraduate English. But the young priest was inspired by the words he read: "The condition of the working population is the question of the hour." He was moved to make the condition of the working population his priestly "interest." In the face of being labeled "socialistic," he enthusiastically welcomed the Holy Father's approval of social reform through the mediums both of private organized action and of state legislation. Throughout his long and fruitful career as Christ's ambassador, John A. Ryan was to strive to impress upon the market place of his beloved United States the Christian social pattern of Leo XIII.

"Dost thou promise to the Bishop, thy Ordinary, reverence and obedience."

*Rite of Ordination.*

Nor did John Ryan want for inspiration here at home. At the turn of the century, the Mid-West had given to the Church in America an eloquent spokesman for the rights of the oppressed. "Men who suffer are conscious of their wrongs," Archbishop John Ireland had warned in 1897, "and will hold as their friends those who aid them. Irreligion makes promises to them, and irreligion is winning them."

It was this same Archbishop who had confirmed and later ordained the future champion of the underprivileged. It was John Ireland who had educated him in St. Paul's Seminary, who had sent him for four years (1898-1902) to The Catholic University of America to pursue courses in moral theology. And it was John Ireland, too, who, for the greater welfare of Church and country, was to allow his priest to leave him in 1915 to begin his brilliant career at The Catholic University as professor of moral theology.

In return, John Ryan served his Archbishop in his seminary for thirteen years as a professor of moral theology. With the encouraging support of Archbishop Ireland, he introduced economics into the seminary curriculum. In later years, Father Ryan was to hark gratefully back to the memory of this great Churchman, particularly for fostering in him a profound love for political democracy.

"He was a teacher, a pastor, a counselor, an arbiter, a judge of a sort, a commentator, a critic, an appreciator of beauty and truth, above all a friend to struggling humanity."

*The Evening Star*, Washington, D. C.

In his own right, John A. Ryan was eminently qualified to assume the rôle of Christ's ambassador to the market place. Throughout his forty-seven years of service, he was always a scholarly yet realistic priest; despite opposition and discouraging obstacles, he remained to the very end an understanding and courageous priest.

The priest-scholar reached his full stature as a professor of moral theology for over twenty years at the Catholic University of America. Moreover, throughout nearly all of these years, he taught political science at Trinity College. From 1937 until his retirement from the faculty in June, 1939, at the age of seventy, he served the University in its School of Social Science as a professor of sociology. In this same year, he took up residence at the National Catholic School of Social Service where he had taught social ethics since the school's inception in 1921.

Year after year, he assumed new duties and opened new fields. But in the life of any man mere chronological events must ever remain cold and colorless. Of John Ryan they reveal nothing. What could they tell of the patient research, the careful preparation, the eagerness for truth that went into his teaching and his manifold activities as a convincing lecturer, an enthusiastic journalist, an indefatigable pamphleteer, and authoritative author?

The scholarly priest, however, was at all times a realistic priest. The facts of cash and credit, production, distribution and consump-

tion, wages and hours must be weighed in the balance with the principles of the new social order promulgated by Pope Leo XIII. That was his responsibility. He knew it, he accepted it and he fulfilled his duty with the Christian joy that he was doing God's Will.

John Ryan asked no quarter, because his principles were sound, irrefutable. He did not take refuge in his priestly office but rather he allowed his applications of principles to be judged on their own merits. Above all he did not seek the approval of any natural truths he proclaimed in the market place merely because the Voice of his Church had uttered them. For him, they were strong enough to stand alone. But precisely because of his eagerness for truth and, consequently, his impatience with error, he, like all really "great" men, was always ready to admit a mistake once an error was proved.

Now a charitable priest is an understanding priest. Because of his great love for God, it is not too difficult for him to see in his neighbor a Child of God. His love of neighbor necessarily compels him to make the problems of his neighbor his very own. John Ryan's love for God and neighbor had been early nourished within a Catholic family circle. The farm life at Vermillion, Minnesota—where he was born on May 25, 1869—made him aware of the conditions of the working class. His charity urged him to action. The same hungering love of souls for God made it easier for him in his active apostolate to understand the problems of both the "haves" and the "have-nots," the employers and the laborers. Perhaps more than any public figure of his day—with the exception of Pope Leo XIII who had inspired him—he understood that the moral depravity of capitalists and labor leaders was to be corrected rather than capital or labor totally abolished as systems of economic life. He was always a worker for souls; his love of God and neighbor helped him to understand the souls of men in the market place.

This love for souls demanded, too, that he be courageous. "Courage, he had," said Bishop Haas in his recent eulogy, "but it was the courage that the God of hosts vouchsafes only to those who fight for the right." Naturally, his priestly courage received many tests, such as the hearing before the Senate subcommittee on Education and Labor, August 31, 1944. It was his last public appearance in such a capacity and, appropriately, the hearing was on "a bill to prohibit discrimination in employment because of race, creed, color, national origin, or ancestry."

Such discrimination, said Monsignor Ryan, whether practiced by employees or by employers, is definitely immoral. It is immoral because it violates the moral precepts of charity and justice. The precept of

charity is expressed in the command: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The Christian precept of brotherly love is not satisfied by mere well-wishing, nor benevolent emotion, nor sentimental yearning. It requires action, action which assists the neighbor who is in need.

Such courage inevitably lends itself to criticism and opposition. John Ryan had his share of both but towards the close of a courageous life he could say: "To have been deterred by such opposition from teaching the sound doctrine would have been to turn my back upon my plain duty, to apostatize from the truth. It would have meant not merely burying, but dishonoring what talents I had received from God."

With all his wealth of character and talent, John Ryan had a sense of humor—an invaluable weapon for anyone in the social arena. Many times when the cards of misunderstanding were stacked against him, when the battle of wits on the public platform, especially in controversies with the fanatical type of radical, became sharp and often bitter, or when the debate of Congressional hearings became intense, John Ryan's extraordinary sense of humor invariably came to the rescue. From sad experience, he found that some cases and causes cannot be tried fairly before an audience publicly assembled in open court, but must rather be laughed out of court. Perhaps the wit that so enriched his character was but the echo from the laughing hills of County Tipperary. Surely it will long ring in the memory of those who knew him. Just as surely too will his delightful art of storytelling be long remembered by his countless brother priests whose companionship he sought and cherished.

He was "a voice crying in the wilderness telling of the problems of the workers."  
*Senator Shipstead of Minnesota.*

From the time he read his first manual on economics in 1894, John A. Ryan was determined to apply Christian social principles to economic life and, in particular, to the problems of industry. His cardinal economic principle, imbibed from the English economist, John A. Hobson, was: "underconsumption and oversaving are the main causes of industrial slumps and depressions." With unabating ardor throughout the years, he employed this principle as a standard in all his efforts to place a larger share of the national income in the hands of the laborer and consumer. For him "capital receives too much purchasing power and labor too little." But always he considered Capital and Labor, not as enemy camps but rather as a team, unified by their efforts for the common good. They must pull to-

gether, for the souls of both capitalists and wage-earners were at stake.

The voice of the new ambassador to the market place was first raised in a book review article for *The Catholic World* entitled *A Country Without Strikes*. Here properly was begun the ambassador's long fight for the recognition of "the right of the laborer to a minimum wage" and the fixing of fair profits for the employer. Here, too, he took his stand on the right of the state to interfere with the freedom of contract.

But it was the wage-earner and the defense of a living wage that claimed John Ryan's lasting devotion. In 1906, The Macmillan Company published his doctoral dissertation, *A Living Wage: Its Ethical and Economic Aspects*, the first work in English to advance a compulsory minimum wage law. This time his voice was heard not only at home but abroad for his book was translated into Spanish and French.

Since it was a theological treatise, his main argument naturally was concerned with human rights: "the laborer's right to a Living Wage is the specific form of his generic right to obtain on reasonable conditions sufficient of the earth's products to afford him a decent livelihood." What is the force of this right? "A man's right to this indispensable minimum of the bounty of nature is as valid as his right to life: the difference is merely in degree of importance." To interfere with the attainment of the wage-earner's rights is to incur moral responsibility "for his failure to obtain a decent livelihood." And should economic force be applied, it "has no more validity or sacredness than physical force." The one safeguard which both Capital and Labor have, and which both should employ to their mutual advantage, is law. "Finally, the State is morally bound to compel employers to pay a Living Wage whenever and wherever it can, with a moderate degree of success, put into effect the appropriate legislation."

The book, however, which John A. Ryan himself thought to be his most important effort was "*Distributive Justice: The Right and Wrong of Our Present Distribution of Wealth*," first published in 1916 and revised as late as 1942. In it he proposed "to discuss systematically and comprehensively the justice of the processes by which the product of industry is distributed." His principal question was: what was the claim to the product of industry of the landowner, the capitalist, the business man, and the laborer? His conclusion is as refreshing today as then, namely, that while "the attainment of greater justice in distribution is the primary and most urgent need of

our time," nevertheless, for the full achievement of any social ideals whatever "the most necessary requisite is a revival of genuine religion."

The voice of Christ's ambassador had already often been heard; now, at this still early stage of his career, it began to command respectful attention. As Dr. Alvin S. Johnson recognized in his review of *Distributive Justice* for New Republic:

"Few ethical authorities have had sufficient knowledge of economic facts to adapt ethical principles to the economic field; few economists are abreast of the best modern work in ethics. To this rule the most notable exception among contemporary writers is Dr. Ryan. His economic scholarship is unimpeachable; survey his writings, and you are forced to the conclusion that among the economists of today there are not many who can match him in command of the literature and in sanity of judgment."

*A Living Wage* and *Distributive Justice* will endure as John Ryan's definition of the Catholic Social Doctrine which he championed.

"We have still not caught up with Father Ryan's thinking, thirty-three years later, but we are coming closer to it."

*Frances Perkins, former Secretary of Labor.*

Following precisely the directive norms of *Rerum Novarum*, John Ryan wholeheartedly approved social reform through state legislation. "Legislation for the protection of the rights of labor and the underprivileged which have been written into our country's laws is largely due to his unceasing effort," was the unexaggerated encomium of Senator Shipstead of Minnesota. Yet, at the same time, John Ryan had a clear idea of what the relation of the State should be to individual freedom and initiative. When individual and free enterprise can do a good job, let the State confine itself to a coöperative and supplementary rôle. But social legislation there must be; the success even of free enterprise demands it for the very reason that the wage-earners are its back-bone—and the wage earners were his special charges. Throughout his career as a social reformer there is heard constantly the refrain of *Rerum Novarum*: "Whenever the general interest, or any particular class suffers or is threatened with mischief which can in no other way be met or averted, it is the duty of public authority to intervene."

The extent of the social legislation for which he fought is astounding: the minimum working age, the eight-hour day, state employment agencies and state insurance against sickness, accidents,

unemployment and old age, labor conciliation and arbitration boards and the minimum wage. For this last, he appeared in person to address the state legislatures of Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

With quiet courage, complete understanding and untiring zeal, he fought the tyranny of social injustice that threatened the American democratic institutions he so deeply cherished. Senator Chavez of New Mexico visualized this crusading spirit of the priest of God in terms of history: "For many years," he said, "Monsignor Ryan carried out in an orderly way a revolution similar to the political and military revolution inspired by Washington and the other American heroes of 1776."

"Well, this is a great vindication for John Ryan."

*Bishop Shahan, Rector of The Catholic University.*

May 15, 1931, John A. Ryan sat listening attentively to the radio in the office of the *New York Times*. How his heart must have beat with joy to hear direct from the Vatican the new encyclical of Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* or *Reconstructing the Social Order*. It was victory day for John Ryan. For thirty-seven years he had made his own the very words of *Rerum Novarum*. As Christ's ambassador to the market place he had preached its principles and had fought valiantly for Pope Leo's reforms. For too long his had been a voice crying in the wilderness. Now on May 15, 1931, he heard a new and authoritative formulation, a further amplification of the traditional social teachings of Pope Leo XIII.

With renewed vigor he went back to the market place. He had new ideas, brighter ideals, not to sell but to give away in Christ's name. Even those who spent their lives trading in the commerce and industry of the American market place could now see that John A. Ryan had the best thing on the market—shares in a just social order which Pope Leo had issued forty years before. Now he promised new dividends and immediate returns.

On May 15, 1931, a new phase of an already brilliant career began. John A. Ryan did not live in the past. He was a priest of the present who kept his eyes always focused ahead on future horizons; he grew with the times. Now the most important singular contribution of the new encyclical was "the occupational group system" advocated by Pope Pius XI, a system which would safeguard the interests both of industry and the industrial classes, making both secure against political domination. For Father Ryan, the Living Wage was on the legal statute books; it was a job well done. The remainder of his apostolic life was to be aimed at the future; he

was to concentrate all his energies towards the fuller realization of employer-labor coöperation. The democratic nature of the system had a special appeal for him, as would any system that would give men freedom and security in the direction of their own economic welfare for such a system would be thoroughly Christian.

*Quadragesimo Anno* revived interest in the vast potentialities of Catholic social action. A sign of the times was the publication of *The Church and Social Order*, a program for social reconstruction originally edited in 1919 and reissued again on February 7, 1941, by the Archbishops and Bishops of the Administrative Board of the National Catholic Welfare Conference. The wisdom and vision of John A. Ryan were evident in both programs as they were in all his labors as Director of the Department of Social Action of the National Catholic Welfare Conference. So extensive and yet so intimately connected with his apostolic life were his labors in this capacity, that they constitute in themselves a vast and rich storehouse of biographical lore.

In the field of government, the past twelve years brought many momentous victories to John A. Ryan, the priestly crusader for social reform. His eulogy on the late President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, pronounced during the Catholic Hour of April 15, 1945, recalls the most impressive of these victories.

"I would mention," he said, "the three most effective pieces of legislation for social justice enacted during the Roosevelt administrations. These are the National Labor Relations Act, which has made real the right of labor to organize and to bargain collectively; the Fair Labor Standards Act, which has abolished the starvation wages formerly paid to thousands upon thousands of American workers; and the Social Security Act, which has provided some measure of insurance against unemployment and old age. I have no hesitation in asserting that these three laws have done more to promote social justice than all the other Federal legislation enacted since the adoption of the Constitution."

Likewise, of the twelve proposals made in 1919 by the Bishops' Program for social reconstruction, it could be said in 1940 that all but two were incorporated into law. The market place was "coming closer" to its champion.

"We, his friends, will be the first and last to proclaim him a great warrior, whether in defeat or victory. We love Dr. Ryan for his great qualities of mind and heart. The scholar, the patriot, the teacher, the zealot champion of the rights of the oppressed—all find their truest power in a noble priest, a great prelate—Monsignor John A. Ryan."

*The Most Rev. Michael J. Ready, Bishop of Columbus.*

The Catholic Church, true to her rôle as the Mother of souls, is always a thoughtful Mother. In acknowledgment of a job well and faithfully executed, she saw fit at this time to honor an aging but beloved son. On August 12, 1937, John A. Ryan was made a Domestic Prelate in the Papal Household with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor. Formal investiture was made on December 8th at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Before the three hundred guests at the testimonial dinner, the Rt. Rev. Francis J. Haas, now Bishop of Grand Rapids, and former student of Monsignor Ryan, eloquently summarized the life of the new Prelate. He has an "unaffected passion for truth, searching for the major difficulty and meeting it, fairness to adversaries, intolerance only with sham and make-believe, and, throughout, the humility of the scholar."

The Church was not the only organization to recognize his unselfish labors, for in serving the Church Monsignor Ryan had also served the best interest of the American Government. From the Chief Executive of the United States, Monsignor Ryan received a singular honor on January 20, 1937. For the first time in the history of America, a priest assisted at a presidential inaugural exercise when Monsignor Ryan pronounced the Benediction for Franklin D. Roosevelt. And again in 1945, he was accorded the same honor on the occasion of the President's fourth inaugural.

Despite these flattering tributes, John A. Ryan remained a humble and sincere priest. On his seventieth birthday, at the largest testimonial dinner ever held in Washington, the late Bishop Joseph M. Corrigan, rector of The Catholic University, expressed the predominant sentiments of the six hundred assembled guests, among whom were Church dignitaries, Justices of the Supreme Court, Cabinet and Congressional members, and outstanding representatives of every profession. "We can rejoice with him," said Bishop Corrigan, "that through it all he has kept the simple heart of a priest; that he has never been swayed out of the balance required to keep him constantly in the footsteps of his Master, conscious that, like his Master, his steps were taking him among the beloved of the Master—the poor."

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. For the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice. . . ."

*2 Timothy 4, 7-8.*

For forty-seven years, Monsignor Ryan had fought the good fight for Christ. The course he had run had taken him through momentous changes in the social structure of the American nation.

Each corner in the market place brought new problems, new efforts for social betterment. Each problem was part of the life of Monsignor John A. Ryan. Each effort exacted from him his best energies. When he came to the end of the course on September 16, 1945, after only three months of illness, he confidently hoped for the crown of glory that God reserves for those who serve Him faithfully.

Across the seas at the Dominican College on Eccles Street, Dublin, Ireland, on August 4, 1932, the feast day of the Holy Founder of the Order of Preachers, Monsignor John A. Ryan was received as a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic. In his new life was a Dominican Tertiary, this zealous priest of the market place was known as Brother Dominic Ryan. At the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, Brother Dominic made his profession on December 4, 1933, into the hands of the Very Rev. Justin McManus, O.P. That Brother Dominic Ryan will receive his crown of glory from the merciful hands of Almighty God is the sincere prayer of his Dominican family.

In the market place, the loss of a priestly patriot and social crusader has been keenly felt. The wage-earners of the United States, in particular, have lost a priestly champion. "The hosts of American labor have lost a tried and true friend in the death of Monsignor Ryan. Labor today is enjoying greater success than ever before in its history, thanks to the wisdom and courage of such men as the Monsignor who in the dark days of the past decade never lost an opportunity to raise his voice in defense of labor's rights or in the furtherance of economic security and social justice in America." Such was labor leader John L. Lewis' graphic portrayal of the sorrow that had struck the camp of Labor.

If the market place would keep faith with its devoted ambassador, Monsignor Ryan, both Capital and Labor must accept Christ as their Employer. They must swing wide the doors of the market place to the God Who was his Master and to the Catholic Church, his Mother. "In the furtherance of economic security and social justice in America" for the future, it must become the daily work of both capitalists and laborers likewise to open wide their hearts to the Christian Message of Hope. This was the ideal for which John Augustine Ryan, the priestly champion of souls in the market place, lived and fought. This will ever remain the ideal for which he pleads before the throne of the Eternal Employer of Capital and Labor.