The Christian Doctrine and the Social Problem

Marcel Clément

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THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AND THE SOCIAL PROBLEM

MARCEL CLÉMENT

It is not possible to exaggerate the painful seriousness of the social problems that have presented themselves for the last few weeks in an atmosphere that is far from being calm. These problems are serious, because it is on the basis itself of the social doctrine of the Church, in spite of its preciseness and clearness, that the disagreement is being manifested. They are painful, because, beyond the unbelievable confusion of the ideas used to justify the passions, the suffering of mankind increases, the small cut into the body of a society which up until now could be considered happy and prosperous, if we compare it with so many others, is getting deeper and even becoming infected. The Lenten season is a good time to examine one's conscience, because in the social sphere as in that of the family, earthly disorder is caused principally by moral failures. And at the rate things are going, such a self-examination is not only a prudent act. It is the only way of salvation open, if employers and employees honestly want to make an attempt to get out of the diabolical blind alley, where all the social and economic life has gone astray with them.

The Church has a definite attitude in regard to the social problem. It specifies the rights and duties of employers. It defines the rights and duties of employees. Lastly, it puts in the true perspective, the function of governments. « Doubtless this most serious question demands the attention and the efforts of others besides Ourselves — of the rulers of States, of employers of labour, of the wealthy, and of the working population themselves for whom We plead. But We affirm without hesitation that all the striving of men will be vain if they leave out the Church. It is the Church that proclaims from the Gospel those teachings by which the conflict can be brought to an end, or at least made far less bitter. The Church uses her efforts not only to enlighten the mind, but to direct by her precepts the life and conduct of men. » (Rerum Novarum)

I

The day to day experience of labour relations, teaches quickly enough that the social problem, for the employer,

consists essentially in improving the worker, and for the employee, it consists essentially in improving management. Moreover, very soon, both one and the other give up all hope of succeeding and consider that the only effective instrument is force. From there on, the class spirit begets class war, and we see an « antagonistic management » take position against a « unionism of competition ». The social problem is then only a trial of force, where each of the two parties tries for the support of the government. When things have reached this point, to use the social Encyclicals in the heat of the battle is to betray their vital principle. And it is an error that could be costly, because it could dry up the very source of inspiration which flows from these texts.

And participating in this error, are all those who, interested in the problem, directly or not, think that there is the side of the « right » and the side of the « wrong »; those with the management mentality, describing, evoking, classifying and therefore also *meditating* the faults of certain workers or the leaders that they have given themselves, those who have the labour mentality, describing, evoking, classifying and therefore also *meditating*, the presumed injustices of management. And just as when a married couple only live in spying on the imperfections of each other, they are not far from giving up living together, so does the absence of charity on both sides render inoperative the best-adapted techniques of co-operation between employers and employees.

Such is, for the sociologist, the evidence which sums up the present situation. On both sides, it has been decided to use force, which up to now was restrained by Christian formulas. Let us not be mistaken. The example of other countries is instructive. The first battle may be won by one side or the other. In any case, the last battle will necessarily signal the defeat of humanity in onsets where passion, interest and pride would soon disfigure all the combatants.

II

« The great mistake that is made in the matter now under consideration, is to possess oneself of the idea that class is naturally hostile to class, that rich and poor are intended by nature to live at war with one another. » If it is true that Providence takes good from evil, the occasion is favourable to make an inquiry into, beyond the fault of individuals, (that a Christian, who can only hope to be forgiven to the extent that he himself forgives, would be

wrong to judge without appeal), the evil-doing of the economic system in which we are living, and that Leo XIII was not afraid to call « liberalism without morals ». It is fine to quote the Encyclicals and to seek out the texts that justify momentarily one or the other attitude. It would comply more to the spirit of the social Encyclicals to point out that the programme they trace is *not taken seriously at the present time by hardly any organized group*.

The social Encyclicals foresee, in the enterprise, some reforms in structure; profit-sharing, participation of the workers in the management, in accordance with careful formulas and in mutual loyalty. How do we stand on this ?

The social Encyclicals foresee, not a general group in defence of the employer's interests to counter-balance the labour unions, but the birth, in each industry, in each profession, of groups of employers, not destined for the struggle between classes, but for the taking over of the economic problems in each profession. How do we stand on this ?

The social Encyclicals foresee the birth in each industry, in each profession of « corporative groups », uniting employer and worker organizations in one common association where all the decisions regarding common interests could be worked out together. How do we stand on this ?

The social Encyclicals foresee the obligation for each employer to put into practice not only fair wages and family grants, but fair prices — which are not the prices of maximum profits but of an honest profit. How do we stand on this ?

The social Encyclicals foresee the obligation for each wage-earner, to not hurt his employer, to furnish all the work and the quality of work that he knows he should furnish. There again — and the question is no less timely — how do we stand on this ?

III

These are the true problems. The attitude of the Church in regard to the social question does not consist in taking position for one or the other of the parties. It consists of reproving the guilty ones, to setting up the truth again, to indicating — and inspiring the spirit of brotherly love, which, in the enterprise, in the profession and in the nation, can alone permit the putting in action of the technical solutions. It consists in encouraging the employers and the workers, those that feel themselves capable, to take in hand the realization

of a corporative economy, united in cooperation by a spirit of brotherly love, and by the moral control of wages and prices. It is when everything is going wrong, sometimes, that Heaven gives man the energy to accomplish the acts that daily routine usually puts off until the morrow. It is perhaps the chance for some to become the apostles of the social Encyclicals realized in spirit and in truth and not used by interest and passion. « Undoubtedly the first and immediate apostles of the workingmen must themselves be workingmen, while the apostles of the industrial and commercial world should themselves be employers and merchants. » (Pius XI)

To someone who inquired recently:

« But, after all ! There must be some techniques which would permit solving definitely the

social problem ! Or, is social science not far enough advanced ? », the reply was given:

Pius XI has written: « Justice alone, even though most faithfully observed, can remove indeed the cause of social strife, but can never bring about a union of hearts and minds. Yet this union, binding men together, is the main principle of stability in all institutions, no matter how perfect they may seem, which aim at establishing social peace and promoting mutual aid. In its absence, as repeated experience proves, the wisest regulations come to nothing. » The techniques are indispensable. But what can we expect from techniques, where men hate each other. The use of the Christian principle of charity in management-labour relations could alone — but how many really believe this? — permit the establishment of a Christian social order.

PROGRAMME OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN THE PRINTING INDUSTRY OF MONTREAL

MARCEL FORGET

The Apprenticeship Commission of the Printing Industry of Montreal considers that the only way of initiating its apprentices into their chosen trade is by a vocational training program which dispenses technical knowledge at the same time that it develops natural aptitudes by practical work. Which is why, in order to provide a solid foundation and so assure a competent labour force to the printing industry, it has selected for the apprentices under its jurisdiction theoretical and practical study courses which have been approved by the Council of Education.

A—Theoretical training and the Graphic Arts School

Since the Apprenticeship Assistance Act asks the Apprenticeship Commissions to collaborate with the specialized schools, the Apprenticeship Commission has inquired into the best means of utilizing the services of the Graphic Arts School in the interests of the printing industry in general. It seemed to the Commission that this centre of specialized learning would constitute the best place where apprentices of one, two and three years standing could take courses in theoretical

instruction in their working-time and while being remunerated by their employers; and those of four, five and six years standing could take supplementary theoretical instruction at night, and thereby increase their professional value and their chances of promotion. That is why it concluded, the 16th of July 1948, with the Department of Youth and Social Welfare, which is directly over the Graphic Arts School, an agreement to the effect that its apprentices should have the opportunity of following at the School, under a system of rotation and at the rate of a day or a night per week according to the case, a program of theoretical studies arranged for their benefit in collaboration with the management of the School.

In the planning of the regulations the day courses in theory were made obligatory. These are aimed at completing and strengthening the practical training of the apprentice and accustoming him to using his intellectual faculties as he works. They include trade courses by means of demonstrations as well as general courses related to the needs of his work (English and French, applied mathematics, art training). The lessons should be well within the scope of the apprentice, but planned so as to give rise to a desire to learn and to