

PAPAL INJUNCTIONS

THEY belong to history, many papal encyclicals, bulls and briefs; to interpret their meaning, to understand their purpose, and to measure what they accomplished, we must have knowledge of the circumstances that provoked these papal utterances and injunctions.

What can we make of *Clericis Laicis* of Boniface VIII (was it not annulled by Clement V, first of the Avignon popes?); of the *Regnans in Excelsis* of St. Pius V (judged to be of doubtful expediency by a later pontiff, Urban VIII); of the *Unigenitum* of Clement XI; the *Dominus ac Redemptor* of Clement XIV; the *Mirari Vos* of Gregory XVI—pronouncements all of interest in the history of the papacy and of mankind—unless we know the conditions and occasions? The commentary of the historian is necessary if there is to be profit from the perusal of these important documents. While it may be urged, truthfully enough, that as the judgments of the Holy See on things temporal, all briefs, bulls and encyclicals are to be received with respect; yet without knowledge of the pressure that urged utterance our respect is liable to be without understanding.

As with the injunctions of a more remote past, so with the collection of encyclicals recently issued by the Catholic Truth Society¹ annotation is needed, if the reader is to be fully enlightened on the papal teaching of our times. It is even highly probable that the documents may be misinterpreted without ade-

¹ *The Pope and the People*: Select Letters and Addresses on Social Questions by Pope Leo XIII, Pope Pius X, Pope Benedict XV, and Pope Pius XI (Catholic Truth Society; 2/- net).

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quate guidance. 'The Bible without note or comment' was the cry of some of our undenominational educators in the past. Papal encyclicals without note or comment can easily lead the minds of men astray.

The word 'Socialism,' for instance, occurs very frequently in the nine encyclicals of Leo XIII included in this collection. What is the English Catholic, A.D. 1929, to make of the following allusion in the encyclical *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, 1878: 'We are alluding to that sect of men who under the motley and all but barbarous terms and titles of Socialists, Communists and Nihilists, are spread abroad throughout the world and, bound intimately together in baneful alliance, no longer look for strong support in secret meetings held in darksome places, but standing forth openly and boldly in the light of day, strive to carry out the purpose, long resolved upon, of uprooting the foundations of civilised society at large.' There is a good deal more in this encyclical concerning the wickedness of Socialists and 'the plague of Socialism' and 'the accursed brood of Socialism.' Ten years later, in *Exeunte Jam Anno*, Pope Leo XIII returns to the charge, finding that 'Rationalism, Materialism and Atheism have begotten Socialism, Communism and Nihilism—fatal and pestilential evils, which naturally and almost necessarily, flow forth from such principles.' In the last of his encyclicals *Graves de Communi* (1901), Pope Leo 'would have the working classes preserved against the contagion of Socialism'; for this 'Socialism cunningly works its way into the heart of the community; in the darkness of secret assemblies and openly in the light, by speeches and by writings, it excites the people to sedition; the restraints of religion are thrown aside, duties are neglected and only rights upheld; it works on ever-increasing numbers of the poor whose poverty makes them more easily tricked and led into error.'

When every allowance is made for the defects of translation—and the translator is singularly unhappy in several passages in these encyclicals—what is the average English Catholic, A.D. 1929, to make of all this? In 1878 there was not a sign of a Socialist movement in Great Britain; and who are the ‘Nihilists’ of that period? Probably the Russian revolutionaries, then in violent opposition to the Socialists. And in England Socialism, so far from being begotten by ‘rationalism, materialism and atheism,’ was, in the main, a Christian movement, encouraged by Anglican clergymen, and fiercely criticised by the rationalists and atheists.

As for the German Social Democratic movement, its leaders were always persistently constitutional and parliamentary. Herr Scheidemann in his *Memoirs of a Social Democrat* (1929) emphasises the hatred of Bolshevism and disorder, and remarks on the eminently respectable attitude of the veteran August Bebel to the forms of parliament: ‘For Bebel the Reichstag was a truly great and significant thing. I cannot recollect ever having seen Bebel in anything but a frock coat, whereas I recollect his falling foul of a Social Democrat member who had lit up a pipe in the small lobby on the left side of the House. “The Reichstag is not a village pub.”’

Father Lewis Watt, S.J., in his commentary on the famous encyclical *Rerum Novarum*² may well say that ‘Socialism is, without question, a very ambiguous word in Great Britain to-day There are many who describe themselves as Socialists because they consider that this is the most apt of current political terms to express their general attitude to economic and industrial problems, although they refuse to accept the

² *Catholic Social Principles*. By Lewis Watt, S.J., B.Sc. (Econ.) (Burns, Oates & Washbourne; 2/6 net).

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materialist philosophy of Marx.' (Similarly, many hold to the theory of evolution without accepting a particular Darwinian philosophy.) Not only so, but 'Catholics who loyally accept the teaching of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* are not infrequently accused of Socialism, both in this and other countries.' A very ambiguous word to-day this Socialism, but no hint of this ambiguity is appended in the encyclicals selected for publication.

The phrase 'class war' is also not without ambiguity. In the *Rerum Novarum* Pope Leo XIII insists that the 'notion' of class war is wrong; the notion 'that class is naturally hostile to class, that the wealthy and the working men are intended by nature to live in mutual conflict.' Nevertheless in the encyclical *Ubi Arcano Dei* Pope Pius XI (1922) recognises that this 'class warfare' exists, and points out that it 'has penetrated among the nations like a deadly infection, poisoning work, the arts, commerce, everything, in fact, that tends to private and public well-being. And the evil is made worse by the increasing lust for material goods on the one side, tenacity in holding them on the other, on both sides desire for possession and power. Thence come frequent strikes and lock-outs, public disturbance and repression, damage and discontent for all.'

Father Watt notes in his commentary that a 'clash of interests' in the reward of production may arise, 'grounds of discord begin to appear.' For instance, 'if the shareholders receive dividends at the rate of thirty per cent., there will be less money available for wages and salaries than if they were content to take a modest five per cent. If wages are doubled, it would seem that dividends will have to be reduced. From a clash of interests it is but a step to a feeling of hostility and from class hostility springs the class struggle. It might therefore appear that after all

the class struggle is rooted in the very nature of the economic process.'

Yet it is not in the economic process we call 'Capitalism' but in the 'selfishness' of man that Father Watt discerns the roots of class struggle; not denying at the same time that 'unfortunate manifestations of class hostility' are visible: 'When we find a group of employers threatening to lock out all the workers in an industry, because of a local strike for which the majority of the workers have no responsibility, we feel that only a class-war philosophy can justify their action, just as it is appealed to in justification of a general strike.'

Meanwhile the problem of achieving with a safe investment a sure and steady dividend, a high rate of interest, remains for Catholic money-lender and non-Catholic alike. Is it merely 'selfishness' that prevents the Catholic shareholder from insisting on a living wage for the labourers who produce the dividends? Is it possible, for example, for the Catholic shareholder in an Assam tea company, or a Borneo rubber company, a Brazilian coffee plantation, or even a Buenos Aires tramway to take responsibility for the wages paid by the managers and directors of these industrial concerns? Capital, *i.e.*, money saved and invested, is always seeking to reduce its costs of production, to reduce the wages of the labourer to the margin of subsistence. It therefore seeks to employ the labourer whose standard of living is lower than that of the European workman, with the result that the latter is left 'unemployed.' The labourer, on the other hand, is always being persuaded that he requires higher wages in order that he may gratify the suggestions of the advertiser and buy the goods the capitalist must dispose of if a dividend is to be paid. Now we are bidden to 'eat more fruit,' now to get a motor car, to go to this place or that for a holiday, to buy

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this newspaper or visit that cinema. Always is the appeal to spend before our eyes and in our ears.

Can we dispose of this conflict between the Catholic shareholder, with his natural desire for a high dividend, and the Catholic workman, seeking a higher standard of comfort—be he Indian coolie, African tribesman, skilled artisan or indentured labourer—by the simple word 'selfishness'?

It is not only the Socialist who will read with astonishment what Pope Leo XIII thought of him fifty years ago—and later. The Liberal comes off with no better character at the hands of that great pontiff. In *Libertas Praestantissimum* (1888) the followers of Liberalism are denounced for that 'on the one hand, they demand for themselves and for the State a licence which opens the way to every perversity of opinion; and on the other, they hamper the Church in divers ways, restricting her liberty within narrowest limits, although from her teaching not only is there nothing to be feared, but in every respect very much to be gained.' Worse than that, 'By the patrons of Liberalism, however, who make the State absolute and omnipotent and proclaim that man should live altogether and independently of God, the liberty of which We speak, which goes hand in hand with virtue and religion, is not admitted; and whatever is done for its preservation is accounted an injury and an offence against the State. Indeed if what they say were really true, there would be no tyranny, no matter how monstrous, which we should not be bound to endure and submit to.'

All this in 1888, when the late Mr. Gladstone was busy over Home Rule!

In this same encyclical we are further told that the 'followers of Liberalism deny the existence of any divine authority to which obedience is due and proclaim that every man is the law to himself; from which

arises that ethical system which they style independent morality, and which under the guise of liberty, exonerates man from any obedience to the commands of God and substitutes a boundless licence.'

And still there are Catholics in England who call themselves Liberals, while Mr. G. K. Chesterton stands unashamedly as a Liberal for the Rectorship of a Scottish University.

What Pope Leo XIII thought of Conservatism we are not told. It seems clear that commentary or explanation is wanted for English readers if we are to understand the meaning and significance of these somewhat severe strictures on Socialism and Liberalism.

Much else in the encyclicals is plain enough: the teaching on marriage and warning against divorce; the peace proposals of Pope Benedict XV in 1917, and the encyclical *Ad Beatissimi* in November, 1914.

Occasionally the words of Leo XIII are the lament of a just man at the abounding iniquity of the times, who from the throne of the Fisherman sees 'the widespread subversion of the primary truths on which, as on its foundations, human society is based; the obstinacy of mind, that will not brook any authority, however lawful the insatiable craving for things perishable with complete forgetfulness of things eternal, leading up to the desperate madness whereby so many wretched beings, in all directions, scruple not to lay violent hands upon themselves in fine the deadly kind of plague which infects society in its inmost recesses, allowing it no respite and foreboding ever fresh disturbances and final disaster.'

The prospect, forty years later, to Pope Pius XI in 1922 was no brighter; if anything it was worse owing to 'the terrible scourge of the war': 'For all can see how widely spread among men of every age and condition are restlessness of mind, intractability,

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discontent, how universal are indisciplin and distaste for work; how levity among women and girls, licence particularly in dance and dress, has gone beyond all bounds, becoming an open insult to the misery of others; lastly how the number of the very poor has grown with consequent increase of the enemies of public order. . . . Hence, as We see, industry is ruined, commerce is suffocated, literature and the arts suffer; and a worse thing than all that has come to pass, the habit of life which can be called really Christian has in great measure disappeared, so that human society does not seem to be progressing on the road to good, as is men's boast, but actually going back towards barbarism.'

Sed nondum est finis.

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