MUST CHARITY GROW COLD?

THE EDITOR

THE Social Services might be said to be as old as human history, for wherever men live in society there must always be common needs beyond the individual's power to supply. And with the growing complexity of social life, especially in an industrial society, the range of the State's intervention becomes ever wider. The immense development of the modern Social Services must be considered in the light of the social structure that has made them necessary, for the Welfare State is a faithful commentary on the essential insecurity of the world we know. In intention it is a safeguard against the effect of indiscriminate competition; an assurance of a measure of social security, so that provision for the basic needs of health and education may be available to all. Ideally a family should have its own resources of property and of other means outside a mere contract of wages to ensure its independence. It is indeed only in the artificial and unbalanced structure of an industrial society that a money wage is regarded as the only means of livelihood. But there is, as the papal social teaching has constantly emphasised, an inherent insecurity in a society dominated by commercial advantage; too often the weakest have gone to the wall, and justice requires the guaranteeing to all of what is essential to the common good.

In a recent letter (5 July) to the President of this year's *Semaine Sociale de France* (which is concerned with the subject of 'Wealth and Poverty'), Pope Pius XII has repeated his predecessor's appeal that 'everything should be done to see that the wealth created in such abundance in our industrial epoch should be more equitably distributed'. The present Pope remarks that, 'thanks to persevering efforts and to the progress of social legislation, the differences in the conditions of rich and poor have been very generally reduced, and sometimes to a notable degree'. But the problem has taken on a new urgency since the end of the War, and now exists on a world scale, and the Pope urges

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a renewed study of its solution in the light of the Church's teaching. The end of an economic and social system is to procure for its members and for their families all the goods which the resources of nature and industry, as well the social organisation of economic life, have the means of supplying. For, as the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* insisted, 'these goods should be abundant enough to satisfy the needs of a decent subsistence and that degree of comfort which, if it is wisely used, is not an obstacle to virtue but rather greatly helps its exercise'.

It must be admitted that the modern Welfare State, in its attempt to go beyond the proper sphere of the State, contains a possible threat to human liberty, and especially to the radical rôle of the family. The danger may be that the individual's place in society becomes blurred so that he becomes a passive receiver of 'benefits' and loses his sense of responsibility. It is certainly true that the immense complexity of the modern Social Services can mask their true purpose, and organisation can seem more important than the social life of the human person which it is intended to secure. Thus a recent book, *The Social Services of Modern England*,[1] indicates the vast extent of the State's provision for the needs of its citizens and provides an authoritative guide not only to the statutory services but to the many voluntary agencies which supplement them. A Christian judgment on the Social Services, as indeed on the whole territory of human life, can never afford to ignore the primacy of ends over means. It must constantly ask whether the justice which the Welfare State claims to promote does in fact assert man's true function as free and as yet subordinate to the law of God. And it must equally demand that Charity should have its place, for this is the virtue which is itself equated with the Christian life. 'At eventide you will be judged on love.'

The name of Charity has suffered more than most words from the semantic confusion of our times. And the corruption of a word can easily corrupt the concept it exists to declare. When Beatrice Webb spoke of 'the irrelevance of

1 By Penelope Hall (International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction; Routledge and Kegan Paul; 25s.)

Charity' she was not, one must suppose, thinking of the love of God and of one's neighbour. For her, as for most people nowadays, Charity had come to mean the condescension of the privileged, the famous Victorian guilty conscience, and such 'Charity' was indeed irrevelant to the solution of a problem of justice. The food-ticket and the pair of shoes could scarcely be more than a gesture, an attempt to compensate for the failure of the community to provide for the basic needs of its members. There will certainly remain many cases of individual hardship which escape the rigid procedure of official assistance. But apart from them (and such an organisation as the Society of St Vincent de Paul is as busy as ever in coming to their aid) there exists, in the first place, the whole action of the State to be 'baptised'. In other words the work of Justice (if such we can assume the Social Services to be) needs the motive of true Charity so that it may serve not simply a 'pensioner' but a person. And here the professional social worker—health visitor, almoner, probation officer—has the opportunity to translate the soulless business of 'welfare' into the personal action of meeting another's need; not 'family welfare', but this family's hopes and fears to be understood—and shared. The secondary Social Services, concerned as they are with individuating the action of the State, present a vitally important vocation, for through them a professional function can be transformed into the operation of grace. The Christian social worker has more to give than professional advice (though he should be of indisputable professional competence), and his Charity is none the less real because he is the agent of the State.

It has perhaps seemed inevitable that the work of voluntary agencies would grow less now that an elaborate system of social insurance and health services has taken over much that was previously left to individual societies. But the voluntary principle (which should most truly mean the charitable principle) can come more fully into its own if some of the claims of justice (for such they are) are met by the community as a whole. For here is work that is wholly disinterested, a corrective to the standardised methods of bureaucracy, a defence of the fundamental human liberties

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which the confident claims of a secular 'welfare' can in the end betray.

This issue of BLACKFRIARS brings together the specialised knowledge of professional social workers, and is primarily intended to provide some indication of the evidence which must determine a Christian opinion on the Social Services today. The Welfare State is an imperfect solution to the problems of an industrial civilisation. But it is one that exists, and a wholly negative attitude of distrust will only assist the enemies of human freedom. The need is imperative for the co-operation of those who have a consistent view of man's nature and his real needs, who may use the instruments the State provides to assist man's freedom and not his serfdom. And Charity remains, the Church's principal means of revealing for all to see what are the roots of her mission: the love of God communicated to all his children, so that to meet another's need is to meet Christ himself, and that is a need which will last until the world ends.

In the letter already quoted, the Pope provides the necessary reminder that the Christian can never rely on the merely temporal solutions of man's problems in society. The Catholic sociologist will indeed be foremost in his demand for social justice, and the Pope insists that 'Charity must always take account of the Justice to be established and must not content itself with palliatives'. But the teaching of Christ has given a new dimension to the estate of man, for 'in the Christian view of a society in which wealth is more justly distributed, there will always be room for renunciation and suffering, the inevitable—but fruitful—inheritance that is ours here below, an inheritance which in vain will a materialistic conception of life or the illusion of perfect justice eliminate from the human situation'.

NOTICE

The October issue of BLACKFRIARS will contain articles on 'The Apologetic Problem Today' by Columba Ryan, O.P., and Henry St John, O.P. There will also be review-articles on Newman and Lord Acton.

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