

THE POPE'S SOCIAL ENCYCLICAL*

AS readers of BLACKFRIARS are likely to have and to have read the Encyclical itself, we shall have begun to satisfy our duty to our Holy Father if we call attention to some of its main statements and principles.

It is just a little disconcerting that our Holy Father has to acknowledge that gratitude for the *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII was not universal even among Catholics. Thus he is obliged to write of the *Rerum Novarum* :

Despite this widespread agreement, however, some minds were not a little disturbed, with the result that the noble and exalted teaching of Leo XIII, quite novel to worldly ears, was looked upon with suspicion by some, *even among Catholics*.

The same paternal rebuke of Catholics is to be found in another passage dealing with Workmen's Associations or Trade Unions which had been advocated by Pope Leo XIII :

The lesson was well timed. For at that period rulers of not a few nations were deeply infected with Liberalism, and regarded such unions of working-men with disfavour, if not with open hostility. *There were even Catholics who viewed with suspicion* the efforts of the labouring classes to form such unions, as if they reflected the spirit of Socialistic or revolutionary agitators.

The little band of Catholic Social Lecturers are glad to have their own experience confirmed by the authoritative word of the Holy Father. Seldom if ever did they quote with emphasis the words of the *Rerum Novarum* without having their efforts branded as Socialistic! Indeed it is on record that when the *Rerum Novarum* was first read out in a pro-Cathedral,

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a prominent Catholic left the church muttering :
' Socialism ! '

(1) Pope Pius XI is at one with Leo XIII in looking on the social world as divided into two classes. The agreement between the two teachers will be seen by the following scheme :

POPE LEO XIII

All agree and there can be no question whatever that some remedy must be found and found quickly (1) for this misery and wretchedness pressing so heavily and so unjustly on the vast majority of the working classes.

POPE PIUS XI

Every sincere observer is conscious that the vast differences between the few who hold excessive wealth and the many who live in destitution constitute a grave evil in modern society . . . social justice demands that reforms be introduced without delay which will guarantee every adult working man just such a (family) wage. (1)

POPE LEO XIII

The result of civil change and revolution has been to divide society into two widely differing castes.

On the one side there is the party which holds power because it holds wealth :— which has in its grasp the whole of labour and trade : —which manipulates for its own benefit and its own purposes all the sources of supply :—and which is even represented in the councils of the State itself. (3)

On the other side there is the needy and powerless multitude, broken-down and suffering.

POPE PIUS XI

Human society appeared more and more divided into two classes. The first, small in number, enjoyed practically all the comforts so plentifully supplied by modern invention.

The second class, comprising the immense multitude of working men, was made up of those who, oppressed by dire poverty, struggled in vain to escape from the straits which encompassed them.

This state of things was quite satisfactory to the wealthy ; (2) who looked upon it as the consequence

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of inevitable and natural economic laws; and who, therefore, were content to abandon to charity alone the full care of relieving the unfortunate; as though it were the task of charity to make amends for the open violation of justice—a violation not merely tolerated but sanctioned at times by legislators. (3)

POPE LEO XIII

It has come to pass that working men have been surrendered, all isolated and helpless, to the hard-heartedness of employers—and the greed of unchecked competition.

The mischief has been increased by rapacious usury; which although more than once condemned by the Church, is nevertheless under a different guise but with the like injustice still practised by covetous and grasping men.

To this must be added the custom of working by contract—and the concentration of so many branches of trade in the hands of a few individuals.

So that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the labouring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself.

POPE PIUS XI

(Although the lot of work folk has in some places been bettered yet:)

It is patent that in our day not alone is wealth accumulated and immense power and despotic economic domination is concentrated in the hands of a few, and that those few are frequently not the owners, but only the trustees and directors of invested funds who administer them at their own pleasure.

This power becomes particularly irresistible when exercised by those who because they hold and control money, are able also to govern credit and determine its allotment; for that reason supplying, so to speak, the life-blood to the entire economic body, and grasping in their hands the very soul of production, so that no one dare breathe against their will.

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The accumulation of power, the characteristic note of the modern economic order, is the natural result of limitless free competition, which permits the survival of those only who are the strongest, which often means those who fight most relentlessly, who pay least heed to the dictates of Conscience. . . . After modern machinery and modern industry had taken possession of many newly colonised countries no less than of the ancient civilisation of the Far East (4) the number of the dispossessed labouring classes whose moans mount to heaven from these lands, increased beyond all measure. Moreover there is the immense army of hired rural labourers whose condition is depressed in the extreme, and who have no hope of ever obtaining a share in the land.

It will be agreed that in these frank and fearless traditional utterances we have the authentic courage that recalls the words of St. Peter: 'We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard' (Acts iv. 20).

The later Pope is concerned about the mixed reception given to the teaching of the earlier. Indeed, as we have seen, he is so greatly concerned that he does not hesitate to chide his own Catholic flock.

(1) Pope Leo XIII had pleaded that the social evil should be given a 'speedy remedy.' What answer was given to that command of the Head Shepherd

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may be judged by the following words of Pope Pius XI: 'This is the aim which Our Predecessor urged as the necessary object of our efforts: the uplifting of the Proletariat. It calls for more emphatic assertion and more insistent repetition on the present occasion, because these salutary injunctions of the Pontiff have not infrequently been forgotten, deliberately ignored, or deemed impracticable, though they were both feasible and imperative.'

Few judgments in this memorable Encyclical are of greater consequence than this assertion that, whereas *Rerum Novarum* was deemed Utopian, it was (i) practical, and (ii) urgent. Assuredly the Holy Father does not say that the practical and urgent principles of the *Rerum Novarum* are easy. Indeed, they are hard to carry out; and even to apply. But their practical application is a matter of urgency, and perhaps of social life or death.

(2). The Holy Father notes with great insight and wisdom that the division of the world into a few rich and many poor was quite satisfactory to the wealthy, who looked upon it as the consequence of inevitable economic laws.

These iron economic laws were a very effective denial of free-will and, therefore, of responsibility. Free-will is still denied: these iron economic laws are still taken to exist. Only a few months ago, when the late Mr. Worthington Evans, a Conservative, was moving a vote of censure on the financial policy of the (Labour) Government, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Snowden) agreed with his Conservative opponent that 'we were suffering from the greatest economic blizzard that the world had ever seen'! To see how thoroughly this is a denial of free-will, we have but to think that, when the prodigal son was fighting with the swine for some of their food, he

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consoled himself by the cycle-theory of economics and murmured, 'I am suffering from the greatest economic blizzard I have ever seen.' His attitude was profoundly psychological and economic. 'I will get up. I will go back.'

(3). Neither of the Popes is deceived into thinking that legislation is necessarily law. Even more than his predecessor, Pope Pius XI sees that the few who control wealth also largely control legislation. Rome of the Church has such a keen sense of natural reason and natural justice that it is horror-stricken on beholding 'criminal injustice' putting on the majesty of Law. Some of this horror has found voice in the following passage: 'Furthermore, the intermingling and scandalous confusing of the duties and offices of civil authority and of economics have produced crying evils and have gone so far as to degrade the majesty of the State. The State, which should be the supreme arbiter, ruling in kingly fashion, far above all party contention, intent only upon justice and the common good, has become instead a slave, bound over to the service of human passion and greed'! How dramatically does the ecclesiastical order here fight for the dignity of the civil State. The guardian of the things of God makes a last stand for the things of Caesar.

(4). 'Far East.' There is almost a touch of autobiography in this phrase. Monsignor Ratti, as Papal Delegate to Poland, was practically in the fighting-line, and uncowed when the Red Army in its westward raid was thrown back by Catholic Poland. Few, if any, Popes have his knowledge of the needs of the Far East now aflame with the fires of Russian Marxism. But for this Shepherd of the Catholic flock it is Catholics also, more than the Far East, that must learn lessons from a world on fire.

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Some necessary lessons on the use and misuse of titles are to be learned from what the Holy Father says of Liberalism. Thus he says: Pope Leo XIII 'sought help neither from *Liberalism* nor Socialism. The former had already shown its utter impotence to find a right solution of the social question.'

'With regard to the civil power, Leo XIII boldly passed beyond the restrictions imposed by *Liberalism*. In fact, the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* completely overthrew those tottering tenets of *Liberalism* which had hindered effective interference by the Government.'

'Rulers of not a few nations were deeply infected with *Liberalism*.'

We need hardly point out that the Holy Father's strictures on what the Encyclical calls Liberalism do not necessarily apply to everyone who, rightly or wrongly calls himself a Liberal! So, too, in judging of this or that individual who, rightly or wrongly, calls himself a Socialist, we must remember not only the Holy Father's strictures on Liberalism, but also his wise accuracy in saying: 'No one can be at the same time a sincere 'Catholic' and a true Socialist (*verinominis*). No doubt, the Holy Father had in view those bewildered minds who claim, but do not rightly claim, the title Socialist.

Moreover, as His Holiness said, there were ever Catholics who, condemning their fellow-Catholics who supported trades unions, called these supporters 'Socialists.'

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So many of the readers of BLACKFRIARS here and abroad are clerics and, indeed priests, that a concluding command of the Holy Father must be emphasised. Addressing his fellow Bishops especially, he says: 'It is your chief duty, Venerable Brethren, and that

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of your clergy, to seek diligently, to select prudently, and train fittingly those lay apostles amongst working-men and amongst employers.'

'No easy task is here imposed upon the clergy. Wherefore all candidates for the sacred priesthood must be adequately prepared to meet it by intense study of social matters.'

This most important command of the Holy Father could not be better fulfilled than by a systematic study of the two great Encyclicals issued from the See of Rome in these last forty years. Perhaps some enterprising Catholic publisher will see that there is a cheap copy of these two Encyclicals *in their original Latin*; with their official divisions.* Only when trained to study these two masterpieces in their original and official language will the priests in the Church's fighting-line be armed for the 'fight that awaits them.'

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*It is regrettable that the English translation of *Rerum Novarum* is still accompanied by a Scheme of Contents which is (1) not the official one; and (2) is inaccurate.