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THE SPECIALISATION OF THE JOINT PASTORAL

THE JOINT PASTORAL on the Social Question from the Catholic Hierarchy was particularly noteworthy for what may be called its specialisation. We have long heard the complaint that the official pronouncements of the Church are ineffective because they are too general to move the wills of individuals. This is largely an excuse for shirking responsibility in regard to momentous Encyclicals like *Rerum Novarum* or *Quadragesimo Anno*. The Joint Pastoral leaves no room for such an excuse because of the detail in which it describes the minimum which a Christian should accept and for which therefore every Christian in this country is bound to strive. It remains to be seen whether we shall be jolted out of our apathy. If such detailed direction from authority fails to awaken a corporate attempt to right the injustices of the day it will be left to the blind force of world upheaval to alter the present system—and who can say whether the result of that will be more or less just?

The most important of the Pastoral's special applications of Catholic Social teaching is the tenth point, which declares that the present distribution of wealth in this country is unjust. This is more than a general declaration that the industrial system tends to an unjust distribution of wealth; it is a special judgment on the results of that system in our own country. Reasons for such a judgment are also given. For it is not so much that the distribution is unequal as that it places the lives of most Englishmen under the control of a few irresponsible individuals, or worse still of an impersonal group or company. The other points are equally specialised if not equally momentous, and it is therefore necessary to discover the precise force and application of these particular judgments. *The Tablet* for June 27th finds it 'necessary to point out that the Bishops are speaking of this particular country at this particular time.' Far from being a drawback, this is, of course, the special strength of the Pastoral, that we are given immediate aims for the here-and-now and immediate judgments on the present state of our life at home. It must be taken to mean what it says in the present context. For example, while it condemns the distribution of wealth as unjust, it no-

where suggests that any specified individuals are guilty of injustice in holding property at this time. Personal guilt could not be imputed and is outside the scope of this type of specialisation. On the other hand, it is a moral decision within the scope of the Church's jurisdiction. It is specialisation in the moral order and not in the economic, so that the economist cannot claim that such judgments lie within the field of his specialised knowledge. In these days when the material of knowledge, and with it the number of sciences, has increased so enormously, it is of paramount importance to show not only the precise limitations and connections of the sciences, but also the points where the supreme science of theology, dogmatic and moral, may step in and where the Church may exercise her legitimate doctrinal authority. In this case, for instance, the Church would have no competence to give the statistics of the present distribution of wealth nor of its relation to the money market; that is the affair of the economist. But it can say that the present distribution is in fact unjust; the economist never can.

There is, in fact, a grave danger in modern specialisation, for it leads to an unbalanced view of the rest of truth and a narrow-mindedness which resents any apparent intrusion into the specialist's field. But these evils can in no sense be used to condemn the Joint Pastoral, the specialisation of which is planted in a ground of broad and important general principles. It begins with the fundamental truths of social justice that each individual man is a Person created by God for an immortal destiny, that the family is the essential unit of society, and that the State exists for the sake of the persons and families that compose it and not *vice versa*. It is in relation to such facts of human life that the subsequent judgments can be made. The distribution of property is unjust because it puts human persons and families at the disposal of a few individuals or combines, not because of a complicated mathematical table in the books of the economist. 'A wife ought not to be obliged to go out to work,' not because of the judgment of a health visitor, but because it is a direct attack on the general principle of the family. But the general background of these special applications is seen most clearly in the concluding paragraph which begins: 'There is only one enduring basis for such a fellowship—full respect for the dignity of each person. And there is only one enduring reason why every human person and every family should be respected—namely, that God our Father created every one of us and came Himself to redeem us . . .' The Pastoral is not a statement of purely natural aims and ideals. It must be read and understood within the context of the Fatherhood of God, of sin and of Redemption. Otherwise it might seem to tres-

pass on the preserves of the political or economic specialist. The Church is not concerned with living rooms, satisfactory sanitation, or bath-rooms in the same way as the health visitor. She is not even concerned with these things merely in so far as they have their effect on the natural human person or family. She is concerned with them ultimately in relation to their supernatural end to be attained through Christ. 'As Christians,' says the Pastoral, 'we ought not to tolerate any attack on the dignity of man or on the sanctity of the family.' The Church is not a welfare worker and she does not use her eternal principles and living sacraments purely for establishing the natural man in suitable surroundings. The natural law according to which a just social order can be mapped out has a reality which is not destroyed by sin nor yet set aside as useless by grace. But without the supernatural it remains largely inoperative. The Church must give man a supernatural goal with supernatural powers of attaining it before the natural order can show any signs of coming into its own.

All this shows the importance of counteracting the evil tendencies of modern specialisation and of carefully distinguishing the competence of the different sciences. No individual should become so absorbed in his particular sphere as to be entirely ignorant of the higher spheres of reality upon which his own depends. Thus the politician cannot afford to be ignorant of natural ethics, nor should the politician or the natural moralist regard himself as holding the complete answer to human problems. For example, it might be supposed on a cursory reading of St. Thomas that he taught the power of (fallen) nature to achieve her own natural goodness independently of grace. But that would be to take his natural ethics, largely taken over from Aristotle, as his last word, that is to accept a specialised treatment of the natural law and all it implies as a general statement. It is in his treatment of the higher truths of grace and redemption that he shows the incapacity of nature to reach its own goal without the divine work of the Incarnation. M. Maritain has shown that the root of our troubles lies precisely in the confusion of different specialities in science, philosophy and theology resulting from their insisting on the application of the methods and viewpoint of their own speciality on all other spheres of knowledge. All three were, and often still are, to blame in this. Mr. Hollowood, too, shows the possibilities of the Economist doing the same to-day. Economic Reform alone cannot bring order into the present world any more than bathrooms in every house or the abstract statement of the relation of man's soul to his body. All these particular truths must play their part, but subordinated to the supreme truths of Christianity. The Pastoral

says in its first paragraph: 'The teaching of Christ's Church offers the only hope of a peaceful future.' And the first teaching of Christ's Church is the supernatural Kingdom of God established through the Redemption from Sin. That is the general context in which the specialised statements regarding the minimum social needs of the Christian are to be found.

This context of the Pastoral is the more important when we compare it with a document on *The Christian Church and World Order* (S.C.M. Press, 4d.) issued about the same time as the Pastoral by the Commission of the Churches for International Friendship and Social Responsibility. Though this pamphlet is of quite a different nature from the Pastoral, since the Commission does not include Catholics and this is a general statement of Christian Order offered for study 'in a spirit of constructive criticism,' yet it does go a good way to show the general background of Christian truth in which the 'specialisations' of the Pastoral should be considered. After the universal Fatherhood of God it considers the reality of sin and Christ as the restorer of the divine order as the first truths to be recognised before the Church can begin to fulfil her mission of reconstituting society. But the weak element in this otherwise admirable treatment of general principles of world order lies precisely in the conception of the Church, and this weakness would prevent any effective specialisation. Necessarily such a Commission must regard the Church herself as being broken into fragments and the subject of much evil. The Bride of Christ is not one in reality, but many, and they are all somewhat besmirched. On such an assumption the divine and universal teaching of the Church under which all other specialisations must be brought is in fact lacking, for it is there that the source of division lies. Nor can a solution be found ultimately in the general acceptance of the natural law as a basis for practical application, for as we have said, that is in fact ineffectual without the help of the higher unity of the Faith. However true it may be in its limited sphere, it is bound to fail, until in fact a universal and united Church comes to be realised as the background of a world order that points beyond itself to the supernatural vision of God. That is why the present co-operation among Christians, which is so manifestly inspired by the spirit of Christ, will be turned aside from its purpose and end in futility unless occasion is taken for coming to agreement about the fundamental truths of Christ's teaching. The Fatherhood of God, Sin and Redemption—there is the beginning, but there is a long way to go before the whole body of Christians can declare in complete unity that the present distribution of property is against social justice.

Little, however, can be done towards bettering the social order either here in England or in the world at large until Christians begin to put these principles and their practical applications into execution; and this cannot happen until the narrow-minded, dogmatising specialists give place to groups of experts ready to share their knowledge for the common good, admitting its limitations and its dependence on the teaching of Christ as well as on the nature of man and society. This means a personal sense of responsibility on the part of everyone in so far as he has a special part to play in society. The Joint Pastoral has given an incitement to each individual in his own sphere of life to start acting for these specified ends. The living wage, the living room, the distribution of property, these are now everyone's concern, immediate, practical, on the door-step. But no one should forget the general setting of these ten points, that he is to act in the matter as a Christian, from a supernatural as well as a natural motive, ultimately for the glory and love of God. In spite of its limitation to a special time and a special country, the Joint Pastoral is not a Specialist but a Catholic pronouncement.

DESCARTES AND RELIGION¹

DESCARTES was personally a believer, a sincere Catholic. His education by the Jesuits of La Flèche, and the philosophy they had taught him there, had marked him profoundly. This man, whose mind was so free and enquiring, who was always so conscious of a vitally important intellectual vocation, who grounded all his philosophy on a daring effort to doubt everything, that he might vanquish doubt by doubt and so discover the unimpeachable certainties implied in the very existence of the thinking self, this founder of modern rationalism never doubted the Catholic creed; he could even be blamed for being insufficiently aware of that anxious questing restlessness of the soul that is worked upon and deepened by Faith. To the Protestant theologians who tried to force the religious issue on him, he answered smiling that he preferred to remain in the religion of his king and his nurse.

He was not giving them his reasons for believing; he meant merely that he preferred to be left in peace on this matter. His death was nobly and genuinely Christian. That fine sense he always had of the

¹ Translated, by kind permission of the author and of the Editor, from *Revue Dominicaine* (Montreal), May, 1941.