

Marciniak, Ed.
Catholic social...
ADU1832

**CATHOLIC
SOCIAL DOCTRINE
AND THE
LAYMAN**

ED MARCINIAK

THE AMERICA PRESS

NIHIL OBSTAT:

EDWARD J. MONTANO, S.T.D.
Censor Librorum

IMPRIMATUR:

✦ FRANCIS CARDINAL SPELLMAN
Archbishop of New York

June 1, 1959

The nihil obstat and imprimatur are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the nihil obstat and imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed.

Copyright 1959 by The America Press

THE AMERICA PRESS

70 East 45th Street, New York 17, N.Y.

Deacidified

CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND THE LAYMAN

By ED MARCINIAK

SPEAKING of the Church, an historian has described the present century as the "age of the layman," likening it to the age of the cathedrals or the age of martyrs. What he meant was that all over the world, from Nome to Santiago, an increasing number of Catholic laymen recognize more clearly their place in Christ's Mystical Body and His place in their daily lives. More and more, fathers and mothers, farmers and tradesmen, public and private officials, regard their daily work in the Church and in the world as a vocation.

Nourishing this deepening sense of a vocation is the social doctrine of the Church. Truly, this social teaching is the layman's doctrine—reminding them that they are, in the words of the first Pope, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood," called to exercise their lay responsibility in the workaday world. The Church's social doctrine was not promulgated to guide priests in their daily sacerdotal work. It was designed pre-eminently to answer the questions: "How would Christ act were He a banker, a baker, a broker or a bartender?" What meaning does the Gospel have for a man's working life, for his school, for his

neighborhood, for his family, for his government?

In modern times the Church has elaborated this teaching and made it available to laymen through papal letters and addresses. In their annual statements on racial discrimination and citizenship, for example, the U.S. bishops have carried on the Popes' efforts to bring the Church's social teaching to laymen. For this guidance and direction many lay Catholics have proclaimed publicly their gratitude to Pope John XXIII, to his predecessors and to the American bishops.

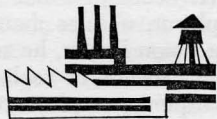
WHEN LAYMEN RESIST

Regrettably, this has not always been the layman's reaction. Some have actually resisted the Holy Father's teaching, arguing that the Pope was meddling in matters that were none of his business. In our country some laymen have publicly tried to undermine the Church's teachings on interracial justice, the right of workingmen to organize and the need for world organization to help secure peace with justice.

Such men reluctantly, if at all, acknowledge the right of the Holy Father to teach and lead. They misunderstand not only what papal social doctrine is but also what place it ought to occupy in the life of a layman. It is vitally important to examine these misunderstandings in order to appreciate the social wisdom of the Church.

Frequently it is said that if Catholic people only *knew* the Church's social doctrine, the social problem would be solved. Hence laymen are admonished to read the encyclicals. They are told to read the addresses of the Holy Father and annual statements of the American hierarchy. But is mere knowledge enough? Today millions of Catholics, graduates of Catholic schools, readers of the Catholic press and active members of Catholic organizations, no longer suffer from a dearth of knowledge. For them the question is whether they will or will not give the Church's social teaching the respect it deserves in their daily lives. Will educated Catholic laymen, once they have come in contact with the social doctrine of the Church, drink it in, letting it inundate their hearts and minds? You may persuade men to read the papal encyclicals on peace and on the need of world organization to secure international justice. Such reading will never guarantee wholehearted assent. Instead it may lead to adroit rationalizations by which a Catholic layman thinks he can avoid supporting a world organization for international justice without jettisoning the Church's social teaching.

If a layman doesn't approach the Church's social doctrine with an open mind and heart, further reading



and study will be of little avail. The layman who approaches the family virtue of purity by trying to determine how many issues of *Playboy* magazine he can read without committing a mortal sin simply doesn't have a Christian attitude toward sex. When a layman responds to teaching on the moral evil of racial segregation by calculating the evasions possible to him, he is not deeply in love with Christian truth. For many an educated Catholic, it is now a question of his willingness to search the social doctrine to discover its meaning for his vocation as a Christian. Just as a Catholic layman can view the Ten Commandments solely as a yardstick to escape mortal sin and to ignore the Sermon on the Mount, so he can believe he grasps the Church's social doctrine, following it to the letter while denying its spirit.

Take an issue like Pius XI's recommendation that employes share in profits, management and ownership. The layman may dismiss the Holy Father's positive recommendation as advisory and expendable—and do nothing about it. On the other hand, having drunk heartily of the Church's social doctrine, the layman may become intoxicated by its vision of man and society. He becomes a man with a cause. As an employer, a sales manager, a workingman or a union leader, he sets out to discover ways and means of realizing Pius XI's ideal for employer-employee cooperation.

In striving for this just social order the layman cannot substitute enthusiasm for painstaking research or hardheaded investigation; moralizing cannot substitute for professional competence. In solving the harassing problems of his occupation, the Catholic lawmaker knows it is not enough to defend the right to private property; he must also be capable of devising an equitable tax structure which, while respecting property rights, also makes it possible for the propertyless to own productive goods. The agricultural expert who acknowledges an affluent society's duty to the world's poor must also know how to share God's abundance without upsetting the economy of underdeveloped countries. The mere enunciation of the principle of a living family wage provides the Catholic union official with no ready-made yardstick for determining whether East Coast longshoremen are earning it.

In some quarters the social doctrine is distorted by confining it to those great encyclicals, *The Condition of Labor* by Leo XIII and *Reconstructing the Social Order* by Pius XI. This is not a small mistake.

To gain the full social doctrine of the Church one must range through the Old and New Testaments and through encyclicals on *The Mystical Body of Christ*, *The Sacred Liturgy*, *Christian Education of Youth*, *Christian Marriage*, *The Function of the Church in the Modern World*, *The*

Sacred Heart and World Distress and many others.

Pius XII's letter on *The Mystical Body* is as pertinent to employer-employee relations as is Pius XI's *Reconstructing the Social Order*. Both are needed to appraise the mind of Christ in the 20th century.

QUESTIONS FOR THE LAYMAN

Some Catholics speak as if the social doctrine of the Church were limited to the field of labor, management, property, unions, prices, profit-sharing, the living wage, social legislation and "a fair day's work for a fair day's pay."

This is another mistake. As a matter of fact, the layman in the United States may daily face far more important moral issues in his home, office or neighborhood. What does he do about family life under the rhythm of urban living? The duty of stewardship in an age of abundance? The importance of freer world trade? The conditions of migratory labor? The hiring of Negroes in white collar jobs? The impact of advertising upon family values, the role of credit and installment buying? The march of monopoly upon the media of mass communication?

By answering such questions and creating good social institutions laymen can serve and praise God—just as great artists do. As architects of a harmonious social order they are not less important than the

designers of cathedrals and suspension bridges.

Historically the Church in the United States has been a Church of the poor, the immigrant, the manual laborer. The trend to a white collar society is changing the economic status of Catholics. Today, the people at the lowest rung of the economic ladder—in jobs and income—are Negroes, Appalachian whites and Puerto Ricans. They are replacing the Irish, Italian and Polish immigrants—mostly Catholics—in the unskilled, heavy jobs. The Negroes and Southern whites are generally Protestant while the Puerto Ricans are nominally Catholic. What does this change mean for the Mystical Body of Christ in the United States?

The headline of a recent article in a New York newspaper was "Only Squirrels Save." When President Eisenhower, early in 1956, recommended that the American public save and be careful about spending its money, one labor leader excoriated the President, saying: "Do you want to throw men out of work?" When a member of the President's Cabinet prepared a speech in 1956, he referred to thrift as an old-fashioned virtue—no longer practical. When a man refused to spend his savings during a recession, some regarded him as a traitor to the American way of life. How sound are such opinions about thrift and saving?

The thoughtful man is asking questions such as: "Can modern capitalism survive without modern advertising?" "Can the Christian life survive with modern advertising?" To such questions a Catholic layman must provide an answer. It may not be a simple answer but he must have one. The Church's social doctrine must help him formulate ideas to meet the moral challenge implicit in such questions. To narrow the Church's social doctrine to labor-management cooperation is to devitalize it and to make it irrelevant to most of the vital issues of our time.

The social doctrine is not—as some have described it—a pendulum which supports labor in one period and capital at another time. It is not a "swinging" doctrine. When Leo XIII wrote his encyclical *On the Condition of Labor* in 1891, the first third of that letter was devoted to the sturdiest defense of the right of private property ever written. Yet this was the encyclical which came to be called labor's "Magna Carta." Those who have read *On the Condition of Labor* realize that the pendulum theory makes no sense.

In the United States the classic defense of the doctrine of a living wage was made by a Minnesota priest, Msgr. John A. Ryan. Even today many businessmen fail to appreciate the significance of his great book *The Living Wage*. Most would regard it merely as a defense of labor's rights.

Yet the significance of Ryan's book also rested in its anti-Socialist postulates. He established a social principle which made industry primarily responsible for providing a living wage, thus contradicting the very prevalent position of American Socialists that the duty to guarantee a living wage resided in the first place with the Government. Depending upon one's vantage point, Ryan's book might be labeled radical or conservative, but it never swerved, even for a sentence, from Leo XIII's justification of the right to both property and a living wage.

It would be a mistake to look upon the Church's social doctrine as nothing more than a set of tools handed to laymen. The fact that an apprentice has a chest of tools does not endow him with the skill of a carpenter. To qualify as a journeyman, an apprentice must learn how to use the tools of the trade. Exactly the same problem exists with the Church's social doctrine. The Church concerns itself not only with the basic principles of a just social order but also with ways and means of achieving it. That is why the notion of social justice is at the core of her social teaching. Without the idea of social justice a layman's understanding of the Church's social doctrine will be as limited as the knowledge of a garage mechanic who knows everything about the automobile except how to start it.

Social justice is the "engineering" virtue. It is concerned with organizing human talents and society's resources so that ungodly social practices will be replaced by a framework of justice. It requires patience and planning, organization, compromise perhaps, and negotiation—all directed toward realizing, in law and social custom, Christ's social teaching. Without the virtue of social justice the layman is left with a mere handbook of "do's and don't's" about social policy and with no sense of how intelligent, God-loving men actually go about "reconstructing the social order." How, then, would the virtue of social justice make the Church's teaching on interracial justice, for example, a living doctrine? Here are two examples from real life.

Case No. 1: Not many years ago new Negro students at two Midwestern Catholic colleges were so subjected to abuse by students, alumni and teachers that they had to leave. The reactions of the two college presidents to this injustice were strikingly different. At the first college the president, aided by the teachers, went into action. The faculty prayed privately in reparation for the mistreatment accorded these Negro students; outstanding Negro scholars were invited to address assemblies on their scientific specialties; students were encouraged to volunteer their spare time at a Martin de Porres neighborhood center; student leaders were delegated to attend con-

gresses at which Negro students from other colleges were active leaders; and finally, scholarships were awarded to three Negro religious so that the campus (and its residence hall) would be graced by their presence. Three years later, Negro lay students were sought out, admitted and integrated into the student body without incident. This college had done more than acknowledge the immorality of racial prejudice; it had practiced the virtue of social justice by hastening the day when racial barriers would be removed.

At the second college during these same three years, nothing was done even though the college president readily admitted the existence of racial injustice. As one might expect, the second college, even five years later, had no Negro students and had made no plans to admit any—despite the fact that qualified Negroes applied every September.

Case No. 2: Upon returning from World War II a veteran persuaded his wife that they should raise their family in a neighborhood where their children would not be contaminated by the racial prejudice of neighbors. Consequently the couple moved into one of the few interracial sections in Chicago confident that they had avoided contagion. But in less than five years, the veteran and his wife awoke to the fact that they had failed. They were now the only white family in the block; all the others had fled as Negro families moved in.

When shortly thereafter the veteran died, his widow and their two children moved to another neighborhood—again an interracial one. But this time she did not leave the neighborhood's future to chance or to the pressure of prejudice. As an active officer of her community organization she strove mightily and successfully to maintain the neighborhood's interracial character. In addition she volunteered her spare time to defeat a political candidate who favored Jim Crow housing. Thanks to her understanding of social justice, her husband's dream for their children will be realized.

The virtue of social justice is a potent antidote for the tendency to overemphasize the "consumer approach" to social reconstruction. The predominant approach of Catholics toward improving the moral quality of movies and comic books, for example, has been the method of consumer boycott and education. Unfortunately, while such public education was being tried, progress in developing talented laymen to reform these industries from within was extremely slow.

Why this lag? In the past, the layman's role in economic and political reform was generally created in the image and likeness of the priest's. The names of Catholic social action leaders among bishops and priests abound in this country. The great names of Ryan, Maguire, Dietz, Parsons, Haas, Gibbons, Husslein, Kerby and others are easy

to recall. But laymen are not so easily named. When social reform by laymen is tailored to suit the priestly role, the importance of the layman's special responsibilities within his own occupation, trade or profession is neglected. In doing something about the Church's social doctrine the priest's influence is limited to writing, speaking, counseling, publishing a paper, running a labor school or setting an example. But economic reform is chiefly accomplished from within one's occupation. It is the layman who must devote himself to the tedious task of developing habits, policies, laws and institutions which reflect the Christian spirit.

The ways of social action are not always glamorous: Attending endless meetings, devoting evenings to doorbell ringing, organizing committees, and so on. Yet these are the most effective ways to reroute economic and political policy. These are roads rarely open to the priest; yet they are almost always available to the layman.

Efforts by Catholics to halt Sunday selling and shopping illustrate this point. For the last 10 years a national movement of Protestants and Catholics has come



into existence to discourage Sunday buying. But this campaign, basically customer-orientated, has had slight success. Where the movement did succeed, it was not only because laymen recognized the importance of sanctifying Sunday but also because they had acquired the habit of social justice. They worked from inside their retail business through close union-management cooperation or through the concerted action of retailers themselves. Let me cite an example.

In 1957 the Cardinal Archbishop of Chicago issued a pastoral letter admonishing his faithful against Sunday shopping and selling. A perplexed baker called upon his pastor to ask whether, in view of the Cardinal's strong language, he was morally obliged to close his bakery on Sunday morning. In the typical parish he would have received either one of two answers:

1) "You have to close, no matter what the consequences. You're selling on Sunday, the Lord's Day."

2) "In your special circumstances the Sunday rule against selling wasn't intended to apply to you."

Instead, the baker received a third reply, which revealed that the pastor not only knew his social doctrine but also was skilled in the virtue of social justice. He asked the baker, "Why is it that you can't close your store on Sunday?" The baker replied: "If I shut my doors, three blocks

down there's another baker who'll get part of my Sunday business, and in the opposite direction another baker will get the rest. Financially I can't afford to lose this business to my competition."

The priest continued: "Why don't you talk to the other bakers about all three of you closing down on Sunday? Then none of you would profit on the other's observance of Sunday." That made sense to the baker. As a result, the baker and his pastor visited the other two bakers who, not surprisingly, were also eager to close but feared their competition. Today all three are shut on Sunday morning.

The moral is clear. These men did more than know the Church's social doctrine. They knew what to do with it. In short the pastor and his baker-parishioner were practicing the virtue of social justice.

The most frequent criticism I have heard against the Church's social doctrine is that it is "too idealistic" or "impractical." Where laymen operate without the habit of social justice, this criticism often has merit. However the social crusader need not worry about having his head in the clouds when the habit of social justice plants his feet firmly on the ground of reality. Seldom would such a social crusader face the dilemma of either observing the Church's social doctrine or going out of business. Let me cite this case.

With financial help from his father, a

young man I know went into the dairy business near Milwaukee. Inspired by his teachers at the University of Notre Dame, he was determined to uphold the basic principles of the American bishops' 1940 pastoral letter *The Church and Social Order*. He negotiated with the union his employes had chosen, paid them a living wage and felt that he had done his duty to the Church's social teaching.

In less than two years he was in serious financial trouble and was slowly being forced out of business. Why? His dairy competitors were not unionized, paid much lower wages, and so were able to sell their butter cheaper than he could make it.

When he explained his financial plight to friends, the Notre Dame man was greeted with jibes and jeers. The taunt that hurt him most was: "That's what you get for following the Pope—he never had to meet a payroll."

But the young businessman wasn't licked. He still had his yen for social justice. He then did what he now admits he should have done originally. He called into his office the other dairy dealers with union contracts and the business agent for the union. Nobody was surprised to find that the other union firms were also running deeply in the red because of cutthroat competition from low-wage companies. All present agreed that the nonunion firms needed unionization and that mutual discussion of

production and business methods might help them cut costs. As a result, the union went out and organized the unorganized dairy employes. And by sharing know-how, the dealers cut their costs.

Today my Notre Dame friend has a flourishing dairy business and is not only paying a living wage but has gone beyond it to put into operation other advanced labor-management ideas which he gleaned from the Church's social doctrine.

However, the Church's social doctrine is not a handbook to which a layman can refer for a solution whenever he is confronted by a problem. The social doctrine is but a starting point, better still, a vantage point from which he can regard his vocation as a layman. The social doctrine is less a set of moral rules and more a Christian vision of man and his many works. In so utilizing social doctrine the layman becomes an architect, a creator, a renewer of a human society, so that, as Pius XI wrote,

All the institutions of public and social life will be imbued with the spirit of justice and this justice must above all be truly operative. It must build up a juridical and social order able to pervade all economic life. Social charity should be, as it were, the soul of this order.

There is a profound paradox about the

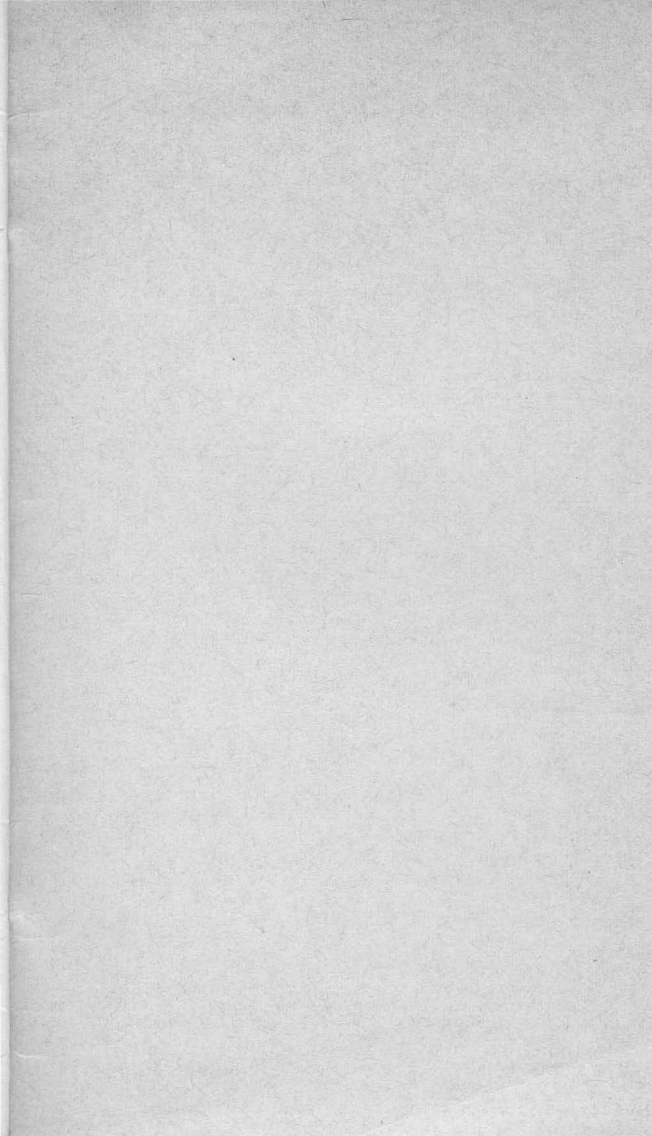
layman's handling of papal social doctrine: only by withdrawing from the Pope can the layman actually come close to him. The social doctrine may not be left to the general principles outlined in an encyclical. It must be incorporated, by laymen, in the meat-and-potatoes immediacy of human existence. On this level the layman who has absorbed the teachings of the Church must carry on—but on his own responsibility, in his own name and within the social conditions in which God places him. In such circumstances, as he invokes the aid of the Holy Spirit, he dare not speak with the authority of the Church.

Yet if the Church's social teaching is to be a living doctrine, the layman must incarnate it within his vocation as father, husband, workman, citizen and neighbor. On this level authoritative quotations from the Holy Father will be of little value. But transformed by Christ and His vision of society, the layman will, in turn, transform the world into Christ's image.

The key to this transformation is the social doctrine of Christ.



WALKER & HILLMAN
STATIONERS & PRINTERS
418



Printed for

Catholic Council on Working Life

Christian Family Movement

Young Christian Students

Young Christian Workers

