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THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

By

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REMOVING THE BREEDING GROUNDS OF COMMUNISM

By JOHN A. O'BRIEN, PH.D., LL.D.,

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IN Cerro de Los Angeles, on a hill marking the geographical center of Spain, a monumental statue of Christ had been erected to stand forever as a symbol of the dedication of the Spanish nation to the Sacred Heart. When a regiment of Spanish Communists stood with loaded guns before this great statue and poured volley after volley of steel into the figure of Christ until it fell in fragments to the ground, Communism manifested to the world in a graphic and dramatic manner its hatred of God, religion and the Church. The picture of this shooting was published in newspapers throughout the civilized world. More clearly and convincingly than a volume of words, it portrayed the attitude of Communism toward religion. To manifest further their renunciation of the Christian Faith and their espousal of the militant atheism of Soviet Russia, they then changed the name of the hill, Cerro de Los Angeles, meaning Hill of the Angels, to Cerro Rojo, meaning "Red" Hill.

More than 20,000 religious institutions in Spain—churches, convents, monasteries, orphanages, hospitals—have been burned and destroyed according to documentary reports published in *La Croix du Midi* in Toulouse, France. Eleven bishops have been mur-

dered. The number of priests who have been ruthlessly slaughtered is estimated by the Spanish College in Rome on the basis of 200 letters from bishops and clergy and from the testimony of eight bishops and 188 priests who have come to Rome since the beginning of the rebellion, to range between 40 and 50 per cent of the total priesthood of Spain.

Before the present outbreak there were in Spain 60 bishops, 33,500 priests, and 26,640 religious. In nine dioceses 80 per cent of the priests have been killed. In one diocese, that of Malaga, 90 per cent of the priests have been murdered. All the churches in 23 dioceses have been burned.¹ Even the gentle nuns have not escaped the furious blood lust of the Communists, a number of them having been slaughtered with women Reds aiding in their massacre. The whole world stands aghast at the wholesale crucifixion of the Christian people of Spain.

Nor is this action of the Communists peculiar to those in Spain. It is typical of Communism wherever it finds an opportunity to vent its hatred of religion. Over the doors of the Kremlin in Leningrad the Communists have carved the words of Karl Marx, which sound the keynote of their philosophy: "Religion is the opiate of the people." After the overthrow of the Czar, they launched a campaign for the extermination of religion from all the States of the Soviet Republic.

Lest the contemporaneity of the slaughter in Spain tend to overshadow the orgy in Russia, let it

¹ N. C. W. C. cable from Vatican City appearing in *The Register*, Denver, February 13, 1937.

be remembered that according to estimates widely published in the papers of the country, the Communists on coming into power murdered the royal family, 28 bishops and archbishops, 6,775 clergymen, 6,575 teachers, 8,800 doctors, 54,850 officers, 260,000 soldiers, 150,000 police officers, 48,000 gendarmes, 355,250 intellectuals, 198,000 workers, and 915,000 peasants. In short, more than 2,000,000 human beings were slaughtered like cattle, 432,279 from the cultured class and 1,571,000 from the ranks of the laborers and peasants. There in brief is the strange disregard of the Communists for the sanctity of human life. There is their furious hatred of God and of all who minister to the religious needs of mankind.

What Is Communism?

Is it any wonder then that the Church condemns Communism and opposes it as the greatest menace to Christianity and to all religious faith in the world today? What then is Communism? It is an economic theory, a political movement, and a philosophy of life. Economically, it denies the right of the individual to own any productive property, asserting that the instruments of production should all be in the hands of the State. Politically, it differs from Socialism in advocating violence, revolution and open class warfare as the only effective weapons for the establishment of the Communistic State with its absolute monopoly of the land and wealth of a nation. As a philosophy it is based upon the materialistic interpretation of history, denies the existence of God and

the after-life, asserting that man is merely a social animal with no spiritual nature and no eternal destiny.

Militant atheism is of its essence, and its primary crusade is the wiping out of all belief in God, immortality and the spiritual nature of man. That is why there is a fanatical crusading zeal among Communists which is generally lacking among the proponents of a merely political movement or economic system. They have the zeal of religious crusaders, but a zeal that is turned entirely toward the destruction of all religion.

Listen to Lenin, the father of the Soviet Republic: "Religion must be abolished. The best country is a Godless country. If religion would pass out quietly, our attitude will be one of benevolent tolerance. But if it resists we will hasten its exit by violence proportionate to its resistance."

Listen to Stalin, the present dictator of Russia: "Keep children away from religious training and home life until they are eighteen years of age, then they will be good Communists." How well they have succeeded in rooting out religion from the minds of the young as a result of this policy of forbidding all religious instruction, while conducting a campaign of militant atheism, is related in a United Press dispatch from Moscow and carried in the newspapers published the very day I write these lines. Thus the dispatch tells of the almost complete disappearance of youth from the few places of worship left standing.

"Services now are attended," writes the corre-

spondent from Moscow, "mostly by old or middle-aged women, fewer men and a number of children brought by mothers and grandmothers. *Youth is absent.* With the gradual diminution of congregations, those who had gone over to the New church dropped out first and few New churches continue to operate. Emphasis against religion undoubtedly is strong in all organizations, and the term 'churchgoer' is one of condemnation. The press exerts its influence against worship."²

The keynote of the government's educational policy since the rise of the Communists to control is thus frankly stated by the late head of the education department: "We hate Christianity and Christians. Even the best of them must be considered as our worst enemies. They preach love of one's neighbor and mercy, which is contrary to our principles. . . . What we need is hatred."³

One of the best summations of Communism and its implications which the writer has seen is that given by Dr. David Kinley, President-Emeritus of the University of Illinois and one of the outstanding scholars of our day. "Communism is economically unsound," he writes, "religiously atheistic, socially destructive, ethically indefensible, and morally debasing. Certainly there is much that is wrong in our present social arrangements, a statement that is true of every form of society that history has known. But Communism is not the road to its elimination. The right road is along an ideal practice of the law of

² United Press dispatch, Moscow, January 23, 1937.

³ "American Plan of Government vs. Communism," by Dr. David Kinley, in *Our Sunday Visitor*, January 17, 1937.

love, faith in God, deeper sense of personal responsibility for one's neighbors, for social progress and for righteousness, a deeper and wider feeling of the brotherhood of man."⁴

The Real Issue

Because the Church opposes Communism and invites people of all faiths to join with her in presenting a united front to Communism, which she characterizes as the greatest menace to Christian civilization today, the impression has arisen in some circles that the Church looks with ill-concealed favor upon Fascism. Thus *The Christian Century* opposed the entry of Protestants into the campaign launched by the Pontiff against Communism on this ground. But the inference is unfounded. For the Church in America opposes Fascism and Naziism as well as Communism. The latter has been more violent in its war against religion and has naturally been regarded as the gravest menace. *The real issue at stake, however, is the totalitarianism of the State.*

While Communism and Fascism differ in their origins and seem poles apart in their goals, they are both expressions of the same fundamental philosophy—the absolute supremacy of the State over the political, social, economic, cultural and religious life of the individual. He is reduced to a tiny cog in the vast machinery of the State. His individual rights are usurped by the Colossus of the State which rides like a Juggernaut over the traditional liberties of the individual, trampling upon his freedom to plan his

⁴ *Ibid.*

own life, to fashion his own culture, and to worship according to the dictates of his own conscience. Fascism under Mussolini has been favorable on the whole to the influence of religion upon the people, but has shown a determination to dominate the consciences of the young and to claim a prior allegiance that gives forebodings of future trouble.

Naziism under Hitler has been frequently openly hostile to both the Protestant and Catholic Churches, and has sought to reduce them to mere arms of the all-powerful State. The dictatorial power lodged in both Fascism and Naziism is a constant threat to the religious freedom of the individual—a sword of Damocles suspended by a thread over the individual's head keeping him in anxiety and turmoil. Indeed, not only have the Nazis sought to substitute a religion of blood and mythology for Christianity and Judaism, but they have given signs of turning all their vast powers of destruction upon these historic faiths after the menace of Communism has been removed.

No, the Church does not look with favor or complacency upon the growth of either of these forms of government in America. From an experience of many centuries she knows the dangers they present to the rights of the individual. But the greatest menace at the present time is from the world-wide spread of Communism. For that reason the Church singles it out as the target for her first attack, and invites people of all faiths and indeed people of no definite religious affiliation but of good will to unite in a campaign for the preservation of our civiliza-

tion with its guaranties for the treasured rights and liberties of the individual. For in her philosophy so sacred is the personality of the individual citizen that he has rights which cannot be abridged even by the State. He does not exist for the State, or for the politico-social order, but these exist for him. The index of their worth is the measure in which they safeguard his rights and his freedom and afford him opportunities for the cultivation of his own social and cultural life and the attainment of his spiritual autonomy.

Church Flourishes in a Democracy

While the Church does not undertake to decree what form of political government her children should establish, and while she is capable of adapting herself to every form of legitimate government, there would seem to be no questioning of the fact that she thrives and flourishes in a special manner in a democracy and finds it peculiarly suited to her genius and character. Here she enjoys the largest measure of freedom—freedom to worship, freedom to teach, freedom to carry on her extensive ministry of charity and philanthropy. Here she is least hampered by the intrusions of an all-powerful State into her exclusive domain—that of the religious and spiritual life. In the Middle Ages there was a unity of religious faith among all the citizens so that a union of Church and State seemed natural and afforded certain advantages. Today when difference of religious belief is the most marked characteristic of society, such union would spell nothing but friction and would be unpalatable to all parties. Complete sepa-

ration of Church and State with freedom to both within their separate domains, and friendly cooperation to promote joint interests, has proved to be the most satisfactory plan.

Here, too, the Church is enabled to keep close to her people, and to serve them most effectively. Dependent upon their free will offerings for her maintenance, she is free from the danger of leaning upon the appropriations of the State, with a consequent lessening of her freedom and independence. The editor of *The Christian Century* and any of our non-Catholic citizens need have no fear, therefore, that the Church is secretly in sympathy with Fascism or with anything but the continued perfection of the democratic ideal to which we in America are committed.

The emphasis which the Church puts upon the sanctity and inviolability of the rights of the individual, rights which democracy aims particularly to safeguard, reflects the peculiar compatibility of the Church with our American democracy and shows the kinship of their genius and spirit. In the eyes of the Church, the right of the individual to that large measure of freedom to work out his own salvation, to worship, to argue freely according to his own conscience, to determine the pattern of his own culture, to develop his own personality, free from the stereotyping power of the State, are so sacred and inalienable that she stands ever ready to throw the bulwark of her defense around the humblest citizen who is threatened with an invasion of these rights by any power whatsoever.

The Church is therefore a true friend and stalwart champion of democracy in America. Her friendship does not spring from any motives of expedience or opportunism, after the manner of the politician, but goes infinitely deeper—down to that tremendous emphasis which she places upon the sanctity and inviolability of the rights of the individual, an emphasis which is peculiarly characteristic of our American democracy. As long as the Church is free to express her mind she will lift her voice to the skies whenever the sanctity of the human personality and the treasured rights of the individual to that large measure of freedom to live, to believe and to worship according to his own conscience, are jeopardized by the encroachments of an all-powerful State, be it Communist or Fascist.

Real Defense Against Communism

In what then does the real defense against Communism consist? Not in merely calling it names, nor in denunciation of its abuses and atrocities. The real defense against Communism is the removal of the abuses, the injustices of our economic and social order against which Communism stands in righteous protest. It is these gross inequities and injustices which constitute the breeding ground of Communism and give it the vitality and appeal which it possesses. The only effective warfare against it will be waged by sanitating our social and industrial order, making it conformable to the laws of social and distributive justice, and sensitizing the conscience of the wealthy and the powerful to the rights of the poor and the downtrodden.

That these breeding swamps are numerous in our country and cover much territory no honest observer of the grossly unfair concentration of wealth and of the instruments of production in the hands of the comparatively few, can deny. With 10 per cent of the population controlling more than 90 per cent of the wealth of the nation, we have a condition of unstable equilibrium which breeds industrial strife and social unrest.

In one of the most exhaustive investigations of the distribution of wealth and income in the United States conducted in recent years, the Brookings Institution reports the following amazing concentration of income in the hands of the privileged few :

“Two-thirds of the entire savings (\$15,000,000,000) made in 1929 were made by that 2.3 per cent minority of the population having income in excess of \$10,000. And since the proportion of the national income saved has tended, according to our findings, to increase in recent times with an increase in the concentration of wealth, the process may be expected to continue in aggravated form . . .

“Our analysis has been directed toward disclosing the places at which and the manner in which our machinery for bringing about economic well-being has been obstructed. We have found that our technical capacities for production are not fully brought into play under the system of distributing income and handling the pecuniary side of the economic process which is now in vogue. The particular point in this maladjustment is a failure promptly and fully to pass on the results of improved

production technique to the masses of the population.”⁵

In another volume, *America's Capacity to Consume*, the same Institution reports the amazing fact that in 1929, the richest one-tenth of one per cent of American families received as large a share of the product as the poorest 42 per cent. This means that 36,000 families at the top of the income scale obtained as much as 11,653,000 families at the bottom!

It was to this grossly unfair distribution of the commodities of decent human life in all the countries that Pope Pius XI called the attention of the world in his famous Encyclical *Reconstructing the Social Order*, issued in May, 1931. Here is a summary of the Pontiff's indictment of the present industrial system. “In the first place, then, it is patent that in our days not alone is wealth accumulated, but 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 good pleasure.” He condemns the arbitrary and monopolistic control of credit, “the life blood of the entire economic body.” He reprobates the accumulation of power “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. . . .

⁵ “The Trouble with Capitalism Is the Capitalists,” by Dr. Harold G. Moulton, President of the Brookings Institution, in *Fortune Magazine*, November, 1935, pp. 12 and 44.

Unbridled ambition for domination has succeeded the desire for gain, the whole economic life has become hard, cruel and relentless in ghastly measure."

If the onward sweep of Communism is to be stemmed it can only be by the eradication of the evils in our present economic order, so clearly pointed out by the Pontiff. Not by denunciation but by positive constructive action. "In some quarters," observes the editor of *Blackfriars*, a magazine published by the Dominicans at Oxford, "the Catholic argument against Communism still largely consists in evoking pictures of mongoloid Muscovites, with blood-imbued hands. We are not fighting a bogey, but an idea, and an idea that is so strong because part of it is so true." Another Dominican writing in the same issue points out that the achievements of our religion in the field of social reform are "infinitesimal when compared with its dynamic potentialities." "Before we speak too harshly of the Communists," he reflects, "it is well to remember that it is the apathy and infidelity of Christians to their social mission which has made Communism possible and plausible."

Spain Speaks

In the countries where Communists are waging war most successfully against religion, the charge most frequently hurled against the Church is its excessive wealth and its indifference to the rights of the poor and the downtrodden. In Russia the peasants came to regard the Orthodox Church as in league with the Czar, seeking with its spiritual weapons to

bolster up the tottering throne of a despot who had shown such callous indifference to the sufferings of the starving masses while he lived in regal luxury. Stately churches with their bejeweled ikons and fabulous treasures contrasted sadly with the impoverished tenements of the ragged poor. More provocative even was the silence of the prelates in the face of the grinding oppression of the masses. It is no wonder that an explosion occurred—an explosion which has dynamited the Orthodox Church out of existence in most of Russia and threatens its total extinction.

The situation in Spain presents a grave warning to the people of America. For the fierce outbreak of Communism there is traceable not so much to the planting of the seeds by Russian agitators as to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and the indifference of the rulers in Church and State to the frightful poverty of the masses. Having vast holdings in land and property, they were singularly deaf to the cry of the masses for bread, for shelter, for the necessities of a decent human existence.

Some idea of the concentration of wealth into the hands of the privileged few may be secured from the census of land ownership of 1925, covering more than one-third of the area of Spain. This census showed that the number of individual owners totalled 1,126,412, of which 847,548 obtained from their land a return of less than one peseta a day, or, in American money, less than 20 cents per day; 146,710 received a daily return of less than one dollar; and only 22,450 landowners obtained between one and

four dollars per day. The remaining group of 9,004, representing the large landowners, had larger incomes than the combined incomes of all the others. This means that 9,004 owners received more from the cultivation of their land than all the other 1,117,408 owners combined! Here is the Spanish parallel to the grotesque disproportion of income in America, where in 1929 the richest 36,000 families received as much as the poorest 11,653,000 families.

A further insight into the hard lot of the masses in Spain may be gained from the fact that peasants constitute more than 72 per cent of the working population. In the western and southern sections, before the overthrow of the monarchy, the average wage of the peasant rarely exceeded 50 cents and at times fell as low as 25 cents a day. Add to this the fact that the agrarian wage earner is unemployed from about 180 to 200 days per year, and one can understand something of the grinding poverty under which the peasantry live. Not only does the worker suffer from a niggardly wage when working, and from prolonged periods of unemployment, but also from the policy of some landowners who exclude all men from the fields and use only women, paying them 16 cents a day.

One of the first steps of the Republic was to pass legislation increasing wages in the cities and villages 50 per cent and in the large agricultural districts 100 per cent. In the effort to establish an agrarian democracy by providing the peasant with enough land to farm profitably, the Agrarian Law of 1932 appropriated an annual sum of \$10,500,000 to pur-

chase the land and help finance its cultivation. An honest effort was being made to eradicate a semi-feudal tradition and to provide the masses with an opportunity to live as human beings rather than simply as beasts of burden.

That the peasants have not forgotten the New Deal which the Republic was seeking to give them is evident from the popular support given the Government and the small number enlisting with the Insurgents even in the provinces under their control. Thus, in all the territory held by the Insurgents, there live about 11,296,048 people. Yet according to the Spanish ambassador at Washington, out of all this territory, with the exception of Navarre, a part of Upper Aragon and Old Castile, the Insurgents have not been able to recruit a single volunteer fighting unit. On the contrary, they have frequently been obliged to defend themselves from attacks by the populace. On the other hand, the Government forces have recruited vast numbers of volunteer fighting units.

That the storm had been brewing for a long time is evident from the words which that discerning statesman, Donozo Cortes, wrote to the Queen Mother Marie Christine of Spain as far back as November, 1851. "The Spanish nation is lost," he wrote, "if extraordinary efforts be not soon made to hold up the stream which threatens to throw the wealthy classes into the abyss. . . . The poor people have lost their patience because the rich people have lost their love and charity."

Shortly after the first explosion in 1931, when

Alfonso was driven out, the Jesuits expelled, and a number of churches burned, the writer had a conference in London with Ramón de Ayala, the Spanish ambassador to England. While no friend of the Church himself, he stated the peasants had only affection for the *padre* in the villages and country districts who shared their privations and hardships, but had hatred for the wealthy prelates and for certain religious orders who had amassed gigantic holdings and were deaf to the cry of the masses for a decent living wage. Before rushing in to condemn the entire program of the Communists in Spain, which has gone to such atrocious extremes, let us recognize frankly and honestly the negligence of the rulers of Church and State which had been sowing the seeds of the whirlwind for many years more effectively than any foreign agitators.

Listen to a loyal son of the Church who has made a special study of the Spanish situation, Father Wilfrid Parsons, S.J.: "The great tragedy of Spain was that in the nineteenth century the working masses apostatized from the Church, as Pope Pius X once remarked. And, it is well to remember, it was poverty, destitution and injustice which made them apostatize. They got to hate the Church because they hated the friends of the Church, who exploited them and whom the Church did nothing to rebuke or correct. The words of Pope Leo XIII. 45 years ago went unheeded and his great Encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, was neglected."

Listen to the most eminent scholar of the Church in America on industrial ethics and a living wage,

Monsignor John A. Ryan: "The devastating success of communistic and anarchistic doctrines in Catholic Spain presents a lesson and a warning to the people of America. One of the principal reasons why these destructive movements became so strong in that country was the long neglect of the working classes by their rulers in both Church and State."

In an address recently delivered to the Catholic students and faculty of the University of Illinois, Father Jaime Castiello, S.J., who spent many years in Spain and France, spoke in substance as follows: When large factories were erected in Barcelona, Madrid and other large cities in Spain, tenement districts grew up around them in many instances at a considerable distance from the old established churches. Thus great numbers of the toiling class became gradually estranged from the practice of the faith. Moreover, they were for the most part sadly underpaid and seeing the Churchmen silent concerning their pitiable plight and hearing the Socialist and the Communist orator on every other street corner pleading the cause of their economic betterment, they turned to them as to their only hope.

The sad fact, observed Father Castiello, is that the great masses of the workers in the cities and even the peasants in those provinces where they were unable to acquire the ownership of their home and farm, have largely apostatized. Not only have they left the Church but they have become infected with the Communist's hatred of the Church as the friend of their oppressors—the landlords and factory owners. A similar tragedy has occurred in France

where great masses of the working class have apostatized and are now eager to join the Communist forces struggling for the mastery of Spain.

Writing in *The Commonweal*, of January 1, 1937, Father E. Harold Smith discusses in a frank and realistic manner the alienation of the working classes from the Church. "As this is being written," he observes, "that unhappy land is being torn with civil strife and drenched in the blood of its children. Since 1492, Spain has been Christian and Catholic. Its culture and its background are solely Catholic. Protestantism never gained a foothold there. Despite these facts, the contributor of May Day thoughts in the *Colosseum* can write: 'Nobody seems very surprised that churches have again been sacked in Spain and mobs have broken loose in many towns.' This is the work of Communists with their diabolical hatred of the Church, you say. To be sure it is. This is part of the explanation but only a part. 'What we have got to explain,' continues the *Colosseum*, 'is why the view that the Church is bound up with the interests of the rich is so widely held by the working class in Europe. In the eyes of many, if not most, intelligent workers, the idea that Catholicism could possibly be mentioned in the same breath as "working class" interests seems laughable.' The question is: Why have the Communists been able to persuade the Spanish laborer in whose veins flows the blood of a Catholic ancestry reaching back to Columbus or further, that the Church of his forefathers is the great obstacle to his social betterment? Why have they been able to arm this same

Spaniard to fight against the bishops and priests of that Church as his deadly enemies? The answer would seem to be because the worker in Spain had been gradually coming to the same conclusion himself."

Some idea of the extent to which the masses have become alienated from the faith can be gleaned from the statement of the Jesuit retreat master, Father J. J. Hannon, preaching to a group of the clergy of the Peoria Diocese on December 2, 1936. "More people," he said, "attend Sunday Mass in the single city of St. Louis than in all the churches in Spain." This means that the vast bulk of the Spanish people have fallen away from the Church and are Catholics only in name. An apostasy on a national scale constituted the tragic antecedents of the present catastrophe.

Mexico Speaks

Mexico, too, has an important lesson and a warning for us in America. The writer spent the past summer traveling through thousands of miles of the country from the Rio Grande to Yucatan and from Vera Cruz on the Atlantic to Acapulco on the Pacific. He had numerous conferences with the Apostolic Delegate, the American ambassador, and with many bishops, priests and nuns. He talked likewise with hundreds of lay people of every rank and class. The grounds most frequently alleged to justify the action of the Government in confiscating the property of the Church at the time of the reform laws of 1857 was the excessive wealth of the Church while the

vast majority of the natives were living in the direst poverty. Similarly the reason usually assigned for enactment of more aggressive measures at the time of the establishment of the New Constitution under Carranza in 1917 was that the Church through various devices during the regime of Porfirio Diaz had managed to acquire again excessive holdings. Sufficient at least to recall the specter of her wealth before the enactment of the reform laws in 1857.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the wealth of the Church was truly enormous. Such an eminent Catholic historian as Alemann states that the Church then owned more than half of all the land in Mexico, while her holdings in urban property and in money were tremendous. She was the chief money loaning agency of the age. Meanwhile the natives were living in abject poverty, working as peons for a few pennies a day. The National Revolutionary Party now in control of the government makes its appeal to the workers, promising to secure for them a living wage and a fair division of the land among the natives.

Let it be remembered that as late as 1910, 2 per cent of the population owned 70 per cent of the land, while in the State of Morelos 2 per cent owned 98 per cent of the land. The fact is, as Father Raymond A. McGowan has pointed out, that practically all the economic, social and industrial reforms for which the Revolutionary government is fighting are reforms for which Pope Leo XIII. pleaded in his Encyclical *On the Condition of the Laboring Class* in 1891, and are measures which the Church advocated

long before the Revolutionaries. This is clearly shown by the program for agrarian and social reform adopted by the Convention of Catholic Workers' Association in January, 1913—four years before the new Mexican Constitution and its well-known articles on land and labor were adopted.

Indeed Father Mendez Medina, S.J., of Puebla, and other social reformers within the Church were the real pioneers in seeking to bring about a more equitable distribution of the land and of the profits of agriculture and industry. But the Government broke up the Associations of Catholic Workingmen and throttled their leaders. As Alfonso Junco said in addressing the American Seminar on Culture Relations with Latin America at a meeting in Mexico City in July, 1936, "They take away the Church's liberty, they make frantic efforts to snatch away her authority and her influence, and then exclaim: What have you done to solve the social problem?" It is an infinite pity that the championship of these measures for the mitigation of the abject lot of the worker and the peasant has fallen into the hands of the Revolutionary leaders with their Communistic hatred of religion, while the erroneous impression has been given to the outside world that the Church has been largely indifferent to the rights of the masses and has been chiefly concerned in fighting for the recovery of her wealth and her privileged status.

The saddest hour I spent in Mexico was in listening to an impassioned address by Lombardo Tolodano, the radical leader of CTM, the Mexican labor organization, pleading the cause of the striking

electricians and indirectly of all workers and peasants for a living wage and fair conditions of work. It was poignantly sad for me because instead of coming from the lips of a Communist anticlerical of the reddest dye, they should have been coming by every title of justice and right from the lips of a priest or bishop. For they were the pleadings uttered 46 years ago by the head of all the priests and bishops of the Catholic Church—Pope Leo XIII. And long before the time of Leo they were the pleadings of the lowly Nazarene Who said: "I have compassion on the multitude."

The tragic irony of the situation was that these are the teachings of the Church on social justice, teachings which she would proclaim from the rooftops, but which she is not permitted to preach because she is throttled and kept in chains. The fact is that if she had been free to translate the principles of the *Rerum Novarum* into Mexican life 46 years ago, she would have saved that land from the tidal waves of Communism inundating it today.

In many countries the children of the Church are paying today for the shortsightedness of the fathers. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes," observed Father James M. Gillis, C.S.P., after traveling through some of the countries of South America, "and the teeth of the children are on edge." The fact is undeniable that the favorite argument of the Communist agitator against the Church is its alleged wealth and that of its ministers. In this vein writes Bertrand Russell: "In general, when large numbers of men and women have abandoned a creed in

which they had grown up, there has been some economic motive at work, though often unconsciously. The Reformation would not have had the success it had except for the Church lands and the tribute exacted by Rome. Socialists on the Continent have been, in the main, anti-Christian, and have offered economic arguments to show that Christianity is in the interests of the rich." ⁶ Every Socialist and Communist writer from Karl Marx and Frederick Engels down to Upton Sinclair and Earl Browder harps on the wealth of the Church and points to its costly temples as a far cry from the religion of the humble Nazarene Who said: "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests but the Son of Man hath not whereon to lay His head."

Such persons see only the exterior. They do not penetrate to the heart and soul of the Church to perceive that her sympathy is with the poor and the lowly, and her heart beats in unison with their sufferings. More than any institution in the world today, the Catholic Church is the Church of the toiling masses. She preaches a social gospel which will bring them the largest measure of economic justice. Like her divine Founder she can truthfully say: "I have compassion on the multitude."

The greatest catastrophe in Christendom, sadly commented the Holy Father in a recent conference with a bishop, is the alienation of the poor man from the Church. It is the supreme tragedy of our times that so many millions of the poor have left the Church to embrace Socialism and Communism in

⁶ *Education and the Modern World*, p. 217.

their quest for economic salvation. "These are *our people*," observes Father James M. Gillis, C.S.P., "and it is ironical to a painful degree that we have lost them because they think we are in league with the rich against them. . . . We must win back the multitudes of the poor in every country, save them from false Christs and false prophets, and this we cannot do if we leave any doubt in their mind that the Christian religion is by divine warrant, by inheritance, by tradition, and by predilection, the religion of the poor."

The facts of history, past and present, give added emphasis to the words of Pius XI. as to the only effective method of combating Communism, namely, by correcting the gross inequalities of distribution of the goods of life. Unless serious efforts are made, "with all energy and without delay," to correct the present social and economic injustices victimizing so many millions of the poor, warns the Pontiff, "let nobody persuade himself that the peace and tranquillity of human society can be effectively defended against the forces of revolution." While he reprobrates those who make light of the dangers of Communism and manifest indifference to its continued spread throughout the world, he is careful to add: "Even more severely must be condemned the foolhardiness of those who neglect to *remove or modify such conditions as exasperate the minds of the people*, and so prepare the way for the overthrow and ruin of the social order."

In other words, not by mere denunciation but by constructive action in improving the social order

to secure full economic justice for the poor and the lowly will we stem the onward sweep of Communism. Failure to attack honestly and persistently the main causes of Communism, poverty, unemployment, sweatshop conditions of labor, unfair wages, insecurity and inequitable distribution of the goods of life will do more to strengthen Communism than all the propaganda and "boring-in" tactics of this movement.

Communism in the United States

What about the danger of Communism in the United States at the present time? Much has appeared in the press of our country during the last six months heralding the imminence of this menace to our form of government and to our cherished liberties as individual citizens. Now that the election is over, however, a calm analysis of the newspaper stories shows that they magnified facts out of all proportion and were calculated to frighten the people with the bogey of Communism with a view of discrediting one of the candidates. With the issue decided by the greatest uprising of the voters in our history, the bugbear of Communism has disappeared from our secular press. The total vote of the Communists amounted only to a measly 60,000. While the number of the Communistically inclined may be considerably larger, they offer no formidable threat by virtue of their present size.

The other factor which has given rise to much alarm especially in Catholic circles is the sympathy extended by certain self-styled liberals to the so-

called Loyalist forces in Spain. But the issue here is a confused and complicated one. Witness the fighting of the Catholic Basques on the side of the Loyalists. Certainly not because of the atrocities committed by the Communists within the Government forces. So many of the groups extending sympathy to the Loyalists do so not with the intention of approving Communism but under the impression that the Government is fighting the battle for democracy in the interests of the overwhelming masses against the forces of Fascists and foreign invaders.

Because of the frightful excesses to which the anarchists and Communists have gone, in burning churches and murdering religious, and because the Republican government has lost all power to restrain them, we are inclined to lump all the forces fighting under the Loyalist banner as Communists, and to judge all expressions of sympathy for that side as endorsements of Communism. It is more probable, however, that no such endorsement is really intended.

For almost half a century, Monsignor John A. Ryan has been in the thick of the battle for a living wage. His contacts with the working class and with others struggling for social justice makes his opinion as to the extent of Communism in our country at the present time particularly illuminating and worth while. "The alarm," he says, "which has become so vocal and so blatant within the last six months is out of all proportion to the facts. Not one national or state labor union is dominated by Com-

munists. The members of the Communist Party in this country do not exceed 100,000. To declare that the 'Communist-minded' persons amount to 20,000,000 is to utter an assertion that is not only incapable of proof but is, on its face, ridiculous."

In addition to labor unions, State and secular universities are frequently pictured as places where Communists abound. But in a ministry of almost a quarter of a century at the fourth largest secular university in America, I have found but a handful of students styling themselves Communists. Most of them will grow out of it with the advent of maturity as children pass through the stages of measles and mumps on the way to adolescence. I have yet to find among the faculty of the University of Illinois a single professor who could be truthfully called a Communist. True, there are little fringes of radicals and Communists among the students at secular universities, but they attract a degree of newspaper publicity that is out of all proportion to their numbers. Usually their influence on the campus is *nil*. My own experience in an altogether different field from Monsignor Ryan's causes me to be in complete agreement with him as to the number and influence of Communists in America today. They are both insignificant.

The one factor which would cause them to grow in numbers and influence would be indifference to the inequities of our present economic and industrial order. But never in the nation's history have we had an Administration which displayed such profound solicitude for the rights of toiling masses and

the underprivileged, and such a determined attitude to reshape the economic order to safeguard those rights, as at the present time. Never in our history have we had a President who has fought with such intelligence, ability and courage to translate into the social and economic order of our day the ideals of social justice and human rights voiced so eloquently by Leo XIII and Pius XI.

A National Crusade

Standing with head bared in a drenching rain, the President in his inaugural address sketched as the great objective of his Administration the lifting of the forty million citizens now underprivileged into the higher plane of American citizenship where they shall enjoy all the comforts of decent human life, such as this great land of rich natural resources and of democratic opportunity can afford. No inaugural address ever contained such an eloquent and noble plea for social justice for the submerged millions of our citizens as the following words of President Roosevelt:

“I see a United States which can demonstrate that, under democratic methods of government, national wealth can be translated into a spreading volume of human comforts hitherto unknown—and the lowest standard of living can be raised far above the level of mere subsistence. But here is the challenge to our democracy: In this nation I see tens of millions of its citizens—a substantial part of its whole population—who at this very moment are

denied the greater part of what the very lowest standards of today call the necessities of life. I see millions of families trying to live on incomes so meager that the pall of family disaster hangs over them day by day. I see millions whose daily lives in city and on farm continue under conditions labeled indecent by a so-called polite society half a century ago.

“I see millions denied education, recreation and the opportunity to better the lot of their children. I see millions lacking the means to buy the products of farm and factory and by their poverty denying work and productiveness to many other millions. I see one-third of a nation ill housed, ill clad, ill nourished. It is not in despair that I paint you that picture. I paint it for you in hope—because the nation, seeing and understanding the injustice of it, proposes to paint it out. We are determined to make every American citizen the subject of his country’s interest and concern; and we will never regard any faithful law-abiding group within our borders as superfluous. The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

In these stirring words of our Chief Executive one catches the echo of the voices of Leo XIII and of Pius XI pleading for the rights of the laborer, the poor and the downtrodden. In those determined words of our President one sees the dedication of the American nation to the task of destroying forever the menace of Communism in our land, not

by mere denunciation but by the permanent eradication of the inequities of our present social order wherein alone Communism is bred. No wonder it was that our Holy Father sent from his sick bed his hearty congratulations to the President upon his inauguration with the fervent prayer that God would strengthen and sustain him in his courageous leadership of the American people in the paths of justice and peace.

Christians will best hasten the demise of the scattered forces of Communism now in our land by fighting for the ideals of social justice, a living wage, social security, social insurance, old age pensions, laws for the protection of women and children in industry, and all the other progressive legislation which will Christianize our social and economic order and carve into abiding realities the noble ideals of our great Pontiffs and of the Divine Nazarene Who said: "I am come that you may have life and have it more abundantly."

By giving to the great toiling masses of the world the means and opportunities of that more abundant life, we shall not only remove forever the menace of Communism but we shall make the social and economic order reflect the principles of justice and brotherhood voiced so eloquently by the Divine Founder of our Faith. Instead of a menace, the social order will then serve as a bulwark of the Christian religion, anchoring its ideals deep down in the life of the race.

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