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THE SOCIAL QUESTION—VI

Ideals of Reconstruction

By

Dom Virgil Michel, O.S.B., Ph.D.

St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn.

1936

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1. RETURN TO CHRIST

THE present series on the Social Question will discuss various ideals of social reconstruction. We are not concerned so much with temporary remedies of the evils of our present social and economic order, but rather with fundamental concepts and ideas that are basic to a proper Christian social order. Only a few principal viewpoints can be touched upon in a short series of popular articles. The inspiration of these will naturally be the classic text of Christian social reconstruction, the *Quadragesimo Anno* of Pius XI.

World is Pagan Today

The Pontiff characterizes the present order and civilization in the following brief statement: "Nowadays, as more than once in the history of the Church, we are confronted with a world which in large measure has almost fallen back into paganism." The Pope is here speaking not merely of such men as have abandoned allegiance to Christianity, but rather of the entire set-up and atmosphere of present-day civilization—an atmosphere that Catholics and Protestants have been breathing as well as those who are professed atheists. It may be safe to say, that there are very few persons who have

not in some way or other been affected or influenced by this atmosphere. This is true at least up to our very own time, in which the number of those has been growing who consciously revolt against the entire life and civilization as it has been developing for some centuries.

Paganism, in general, we may say, is characterized by the viewpoints or attitudes known as materialism and naturalism. Materialism holds that all things are composed only of matter, and that spirit as something immaterial does not exist; the immaterial is merely an illusion of the human mind. Since materialism denies the traditional Christian notion of the human soul, it likewise denies all belief in a future life to be lived in a world to come. The logical rule of life for materialism is the cultivation of the body, the enjoyment of bodily pleasures, the seeking of happiness in the goods of this world. A most frequent rule of life for paganism has therefore always been the "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

Another distinct characteristic of modern paganism is naturalism. The old paganism believed in a world to come, and in gods—although both of these were conceived in terms of life on this earth and of human beings. The new paganism of our day has definitely turned its back on belief in the supernatural. For it everything connected with supernaturalism is mere superstition; it delights in speaking of the benighted minds of those who believe in the

supernatural, over against the enlightenment of those who are naturalists. The logical rule of life for naturalism is to obey the dictates and instincts or impulses of nature. Thus whatever is "natural" is also good. There is no sin based on any higher laws, since these do not exist except in the imagination of the superstitious.

Return to Christ Needed

With such ideas influential, or even dominant, in a great part of modern civilization, there is no wonder that Pius XI stressed as a first need the return to a Christian way of life. He speaks up for a "new diffusion throughout the world of the Gospel spirit, which is a spirit of Christian moderation and of universal charity." Only that diffusion can bring about a "complete and much desired renewal of human society" and "the Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ." Without this there can be no true social reconstruction: "If we examine matters diligently and thoroughly we shall perceive clearly that this longed-for social reconstruction must be preceded by a profound renewal of the Christian spirit, from which multitudes engaged in industry in every country have unhappily departed. Otherwise, all our endeavors will be futile, and our social edifice will be built, not upon a rock, but upon shifting sand."

A return to the Christian view of life necessarily means a break with the pagan views of

materialism and naturalism. But this does not mean as some would have it, that we must become strictly anti-material and anti-natural, or really unnatural. The Christian view gives its proper place to the material elements of life. It does not consider material and bodily things as evil in themselves. This was the view held by one of the earliest heretical sects of Christendom, the Manicheans. In the Christian view matter and the body have their proper place and their proper rôle to play, and in their proper places they are good, not bad. Only their rôle is one of serving the higher ends of life, the purposes for which God created men. Even as man must serve God, so matter must be made to serve spirit. And that which is below man must be made to serve man, that is, serve man for what he really is, not merely a biological animal, but a creature endowed with intellect and will, an embodied spirit.

In the same way the Christian view does not condemn nature as intrinsically wrong. If naturalism is interpreted by a man of truly high ideals there is much he would say that would agree with a Christian's principles. Only the latter would say that nature by itself is insufficient and helpless, that it must be elevated by grace to a supernatural life. However, in this process nature is not destroyed or really hampered; it is rather perfected and freed from slavery to impulses that tend towards its own destruction.

Exaggerated Individualism

Modern paganism has moreover developed hand in hand with an exaggerated individualism. The latter holds that each man is sufficient unto himself, and that each man must look out for himself without bothering about others. The best good of all is attained, it says, when each one takes care best of himself. There is no higher law for man, no moral law superior to this principle of individualism. However, the developments of our own day have shown us that such exaggerated individualism makes of all human life a brute struggle for existence in which the favored few alone win out.

Over against this individualism, the Christian principle of the solidarity of mankind, of the organic nature of society, must again become dominant. And all reconstruction of a social order must start from that true notion of human society. Only then, according to *Quadragesimo Anno*, can we get back to the spirit of cooperation and of harmony that is indispensable for the good life here on earth, as well as for the life hereafter: "Then only will it be possible to unite all in a harmonious striving for the common good, when all sections of society have the intimate conviction that they are members of a single family and children of the same heavenly Father, and further, that they are 'one body in Christ and everyone members one of another.' "

As soon as individuals again realize this common bond uniting all men, they will also be willing to accept again moral or ethical rules of life that hold alike for all men, and that should be the guiding principles of whatever any individual wishes to do, whether this be in the sphere of his private life at home, or in his business activities, in the public life of politics or of general contacts with his fellow-men.

2. SOCIAL JUSTICE

FOR some time there has been much talk about social justice. The word is used in particular in connection with discussions about the social question and with suggestions for setting our social order aright. In the *Quadragesimo Anno* Pope Pius XI uses the phrase repeatedly. When he gives a final principle for regulating the distribution of wealth, for dealing with the labor problem, or with public institutions in general, he says that "they must be brought into conformity with the demands of the common good and social justice." In fact all things must be so constituted "as to make the whole of human society conform to the common good, *i.e.*, to the standard of social justice."

Social Justice Forgotten

When we read these words they seem almost self-explanatory and self-understood to us. Yet when we look at the practical life of the past generations, we realize that the virtue of social justice has had little influence in the lives of men. Our whole philosophy of individualism has tended to disregard anything like a common good. Under its inspiration, each individual tended to consider only his own personal

interests. And he thought of other persons only insofar as his relations with them helped him to attain his own best advantage. That is one reason why there has been so much talk about human rights, especially the right of personal freedom and initiative above all else, or the right of free bargaining and free competition. We see the same attitude expressed even in the phrase that "society owes every man a living" which is repeated ever so often without the slightest hint that every man may also owe something to society. Yet this is exactly what the virtue of social justice claims—that every man has a duty to perform towards the upkeep and improvement of the social conditions of life. In determining his actions man must not only ask the question "What effect will this action have on me?" but also "What will the effect of my action be on my fellowmen, on public life, on the common good?"

The exaggerated individualism of our era ignored the latter question entirely. That is one reason why things have been going from bad to worse, why, instead of wholehearted cooperation between men, there has been a bitter cut-throat competition, and why even the social unit of the family has been following the general path of disintegration and disruption that has characterized all of our social existence.

Basis of Social Justice

In place of the individualistic principle that each man is sufficient unto himself we must

again set the inevitable fact that man is by nature also social. As was mentioned in one of the first articles of our first series on the Social Question, the personality of man can be said to be made up of two distinct but inseparable elements, individuality and sociality.

Undoubtedly the individualistic philosophy of life was greatly helped by a fashion that was current among the learned of the past generation, namely, that of studying animal life in order to find out what man really is. This was done on the assumption of materialistic evolution, that man is only in a slight degree different from his animal ancestors. Indeed, among animals there are many social types, such as ants and bees. But the majority of the animals attain a self-sufficient status quite early in life, some at their very birth. As soon as this stage is arrived at, the average animal shifts for itself. It has its own defense or flight mechanisms against attack; it knows by instinct; and it has no language such as ours for real communication with its fellows.

Far from being like the animals in this respect, man has no adequate defense mechanisms of his own; he can defend himself against attack only with the help of his fellowmen, either directly with their aid, or by means of tools and weapons he has derived from common human cooperation. Likewise does he attain his necessary knowledge for life only through contacts with his fellowmen. And he has a well-

developed language for communicating with his fellowmen for these and for many other purposes.

Individual Depends on Society

Man's development is thus dependent on the cooperation of his fellowmen, on the contribution of his contemporaries and of many generations of ancestors. Man must indeed put forth his own individual efforts to develop himself, but these efforts bear fruit only in the background of and by contact with the combined achievements of the human race. The point is almost too obvious to stress; it has, however, in a practical way been left very much out of account in the formation of our ideals of life.

We sometimes think of the more able and talented men as having attained their prominence through their own efforts. It is always true that even genius is ninety per cent effort and work. But the success of genius is just as much due to the cooperation of the social inheritance of man as is the success of minor men. In fact, the more abilities a man has been able to develop in life, the more, we may say, has he also benefited by what mankind had achieved before he came upon the scene of life.

Every man, then, depends for his development on what the society of men has accomplished before him and put at his disposal for his use. And the development depends on the proper conditions of social life, without which he could do little. In a disrupted social order,

even the type of genius that produces the most beneficial discoveries and inventions, will find little chance to flourish.

Duty of Social Justice

Because of the dependence of each man on the society of mankind for his own development, it is the corresponding duty of each man to do his share in maintaining the proper conditions of social life among men and of preserving the combined achievements, the social heritage, of the race. This is the duty of social justice, the duty incumbent on each member of society to give to society what is owing to it for its maintenance and improvement. Negatively this means that each man is obliged to refrain from what may injure the common good. Positively it means that he must contribute actively to the upholding of the common good whenever conditions or circumstances call for such active support. This duty is incumbent on all men, but it is proportionately greater for those who are by nature and circumstances able to do more towards the common good.

This duty, viewed in its positive and its negative aspects, holds of all human actions and of all fields of conduct. It holds for family life as well as for public life, and it holds for political conduct as well as for economic activity.

The mere mention of this fact is sufficient to recall once more to what extent the virtue of social justice has been forgotten in an age of

stark individualism. We have witnessed every type of political graft, although one might well think that the virtue of social justice would continue to prevail at least among the "servants of the public." We have witnessed gross evasions of income and other taxes by those most able to pay them. The fact that such action is considered justified, when the evasion comes within the letter of the law, is but another indication of our complete insensitiveness to the moral character of social justice. Even traffic laws entail an obligation in social justice, since their violation is a public menace, and since they will be effective only if everyone is conscientious about their observance.

3. THE COMMON GOOD

IN our last article mention was made of the close connection in the *Quadragesimo Anno*, between social justice and the common good. The two terms occur several times in one and the same sentence in such a way that one of them is used in explanation of the other. Thus we read, for instance, in regard to the distribution of wealth: It must be such "that the common good of all be thereby promoted. In other words the good of the whole community must be safeguarded. By these principles of social justice, etc."

In fact, the virtue of social justice is properly defined as the virtue of contributing to or safeguarding, both positively and negatively, the common good. The term *common good* (*bonum commune*) was much more current among the thinkers of the Middle Ages than it is among us. In those days of Christian thought the social nature of man and the organic nature of human society were matters of commonly accepted knowledge. It is only since the advent of modern individualism that not merely the terms, but also the things they stand for, were only too often relegated to the scrap-heap old-fogy notions, if not of outmoded superstitions!

Common Good Under Individualism

What could an individualistic age understand by the terms, public weal, common weal, public or common good? In politics it was considered the goal that was to be served by public officials. But in practice, at least, public officials turned out to be nothing but politicians, that is, political grabbers, who sought their own interests, or the particular interests of those who brought them to office. In the economic field, the common good was considered to be that undefined thing which was automatically attained if every individual confined his efforts to his own aggrandizement. This is nothing but the happy doctrine that it is perfectly legitimate for each individual to ignore the common good. And since especially in our modern times the economic viewpoint has dominated all of life, this may account for the fact that a proper understanding of the common good has disappeared and that the consequent obligation of social justice was lost sight of.

Yet even individualism held up some kind of ideal of common good, at least in principle. But it was an ideal that harmonized with the fundamental viewpoint of individualism. According to the latter a society of men is not an organic entity, but an aggregation, or a heaping up of individuals; there is no further existence to society than such an external putting together of individual human units. Hence there

is no wonder that the ethics of utilitarianism spoke of the common good as merely the greatest good of the greatest majority.

In terms of individualism nothing else could be done, unless one wanted to propose that all human beings should be reduced to a dead level of equality—a situation that was absolutely opposed to the individualistic principle of freedom of bargaining, competition, and initiative. Hence the common good meant nothing else than the good of the majority—as far as this was attainable. Since the logical outcome of individualism is the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, the principle of the greatest possible good of the greatest possible majority means in practice the ever greater good of the favored few.

Naturally, this was not stated in so many words, but it was lived up to in practice. Before the depression we gauged our prosperity by citing the total figures of national wealth or national income. We used to say we were prosperous when the national income increased from year to year—and until very recently we never thought of inquiring whether the total national income was the income of an increasing majority or that of an ever increasing minority.

Again, in terms of the growing materialism of modern times, the common good was envisaged as consisting entirely of material possessions or wealth. That was the one goal of human endeavor, the one standard by which a

man's social prominence was adjudged, the one factor of life in relation to which all others were set in their place. No wonder that glorious American ideals like those of human freedom and just punishment of criminals, could be violated in wholesale fashion with almost no protest from the public. In fact the public no longer existed, except as so many separate individuals that squealed only when their own pockets were touched.

True Concept of Common Good

The common good is much more than material possessions, it is much more than the greatest good of any majority, it is something other than the arithmetical sum of the individual goods of atomistic human beings accidentally living together in a certain territory.

The common good is rather a condition of human society in which the single members can develop themselves individually and socially in accordance with their abilities and inclinations, a condition that enables them to reach the maximum fulfilment of a moral human personality. It is a condition, first of all, of social peace and order, and then one of maximum opportunity of development for all its members.

While the common good goes beyond economic goods in its scope, proper economic conditions are basic to it. For a sufficiency of economic goods is necessary for all human development, and is moreover a demand of the moral

law. The common good therefore includes a state or condition of society in which all willing men may readily attain the amount of goods adequate for satisfying their ordinary needs abundantly. So much is basic, because necessary, as a means for the higher development of human personality.

But the common good is not exhausted by this, as those would have who seem to hold that the whole good of life consists in material sufficiency. The common good embraces all the conditions necessary for enabling men to attain their best moral development, to develop intellectually, to enjoy all the higher pleasures of human life—happiness of free social intercourse, a maximum of individual freedom and self-determination, continued educational opportunities, universal justice, freedom of conscience in religious worship, family stability, etc.

In a word, the common good, embraces the entire framework of society insofar as this is organized and established with a view to giving its members the maximum opportunity for attaining all the elements of the good life in accordance with their abilities and their good will. In that sense, the common good is in no way a sum of individual goods but rather the necessary social structure for the maximum attainment of human values by all individuals. As soon as any individuals cannot with good will attain to such goods, there is something fundamentally wrong with this structure.

4. *Social Solidarity*

IN the last two articles we touched upon the virtue of social justice, and then discussed the proper conception of the common good as the objective of social justice. To some it might at first thought seem mere repetition to continue on the topic of "social solidarity." The three concepts are indeed most intimately connected with one another, and a really exhaustive treatment of any one of them would include an adequate exposition also of the other two. But we have drifted so far away from an adequate conception of any of these ideals, that it was possible at the height of our individualism for persons to speak glowingly of social justice and of the common good without suspecting that these can be obtained only where our conception of human society is quite other than the atomistic one that goes hand in hand with modern individualism. As long as men are imbued with this atomistic conception of humankind, no amount of writing or oratory about social justice or the common good will avail much towards the desired social reconstruction, or better, the desired social regeneration.

Proper Concept of Human Society

Before such a regeneration of society can be accomplished, individual men must again be

imbued most sincerely with a veritable will-to-social-solidarity. And this can be rooted only in a proper conception of human society.

In order to live a life answering to the social nature and instincts of man, it is necessary to replace the individualistic or atomistic conception of society by the proper notion of human society as a moral union of individuals cooperating or striving together towards a common end. This end must always directly or indirectly include the common good, for no other ends are worthwhile or morally lawful unless they harmonize with the purpose of all human existence which is the attainment of the good life as far as that is possible for all here on earth.

Cooperation is the antithesis of the so-called "free competition" since the latter turned out to be merely a struggle of all against all and each against each. It is something quite different from the accidental getting together of a crowd to hear a speech or to see a circus. Such a crowd does not form a society. A true society is an organic fellowship in which the actions of any single member affect in some way the well-being of the whole, in which the well-being of the whole suffers as soon as single members suffer in regard to the common requirements of the good life.

Such a conception of human society necessarily includes a common set of laws or moral ideals in terms of which all members will strive to maintain the common good. These common

moral laws must apply equally to all members of society insofar as they are all men, or moral persons. And for the proper cooperative striving towards the common good an organic society needs a directive or regulative authority, human nature being what it is, *i.e.*, prone to self-interest and selfishness over against all fellowmen. This authority is for the governing of the society. It is therefore not an end in itself at all, but only a means to an end, namely, the common good. Since the members of society are moral persons, this authority should be primarily moral rather than physical. No amount of physical force can make up for moral authority when there is question of the attainment of the good life by human persons. That is one reason why our modern society has been increasingly disintegrative and disruptive—a natural consequence of individualism's denial of anything like a higher moral law.

Human Solidarity

All that is thus said of human society must find its first and most basic realization in the family, which has in our day suffered most woefully the disintegrating effects of individualism. Not only is it true that a child's education begins at home either for weal or for woe, but the same thing can be said for a person's outlook upon life. The family is the basic natural society, in which all members must live a common cooperative life aiming at the common

good of the family. This is true of husband and wife, and it is equally true of the children. As soon as these have arrived at the minimum age of reason, they must learn in the family home the ideals of cooperation, of social justice, of obligation towards the common good of the home. The regeneration of human society in terms of Christian ideals will be possible only if the right start is made in the family as the basic social unit of the fellowship of mankind.

The ideal of social solidarity must pervade the economic field, where the ravages of individualism have perhaps been the greatest. Economic life, instead of being a struggle between classes and groups, a bitter mortal combat between business rivals, must in its structure and its functioning reflect the organic nature of man and of society. Just because a fair share of economic goods for each and all and the ready opportunity of each to acquire these for himself are indispensable to the good life, it is above all in the economic field that the principles of universal justice and charity must again be so dominant as to mould the very structure itself of all economic activity. More of this in later articles.

The actual realization of the ideal of social cooperation and solidarity is not as easy to attain as is its mention on paper. Human nature itself is too complex for that, and human society still more so. In the general striving for the common good there will be inevitable clash-

es between the rights of several individuals, between individuals and families, between the greater good of the individual—at least to some extent—and the good of society as such, or the common good, etc. Human experience shows such clashes to be unavoidable; but it has also shown us the possibility of evening them out by mutual adjustment and by a common adherence to a hierarchy of moral rights and ideals such as were briefly outlined in our first series on the Social Question.

5. BUSINESS FOR SERVICE

THE principle of social solidarity must pervade every aspect of human life, especially also the economic field, as we mentioned in our preceding article. Now the appropriateness of that ideal of solidarity, as of social justice, is more readily evident in reference to the members of a family, or in reference to membership in a civic society, than in reference to economic life. Yet even here the principle obtains in all its force. The entrepreneur of any large business enterprise, or the owner of any business establishment, is in no way a self-sufficient human individual, or one that is not dependent on many and various interrelations with his fellowmen.

This is true moreover far beyond the immediate connections he has with his own employers or partners. Every business today, besides being very evidently dependent on consumers, is also very much dependent on many other business concerns of many kinds. In fact the entire world is today economically so interrelated that depression in any one important part of the globe has its effects on all important business centers in any other. But especially is the economic activity of any particular country or nation in many ways an organic whole or a solidary

thing. And the relation of part to whole and vice versa in terms of enduring prosperity is here the same as that of member or of group in relation to the whole society.

Economics of Social Solidarity

The enduring economic well-being of any single business is more or less dependent on the enduring economic well-being of the entire society of which it is an element, and vice versa. There can be no isolation here, or total absence of relation, of part from whole. Now there are two possible relations in which any business enterprise may stand towards the whole society. One is that of using society for its own aggrandizement, and the other is that of conducting its business in such a way that it contributes to the well-being of the whole of society. In the one instance the ultimate goal of business is the selfish amassing of wealth or profit without qualification; in the other the end of business is profit for living, *i.e.*, the gaining of abundant means of livelihood for all concerned in such a way that there is at the same time a real contribution to the common good, or, here, to the general economic welfare of society. The two viewpoints are as antithetical as are exaggerated individualism and social solidarity. There is all the world of difference between their activities. One of these is living for profit, while the other is making gain for decent human living.

Once the profit motive has been made subservient to the ideal of the common good, as it logically should be, we are far removed from the kind of "profit motive" that has obtained in our liberalistic and individualistic capitalist economy. Yet the change that is implied in a transition from the one ideal to the other in no way also implies the abolition of private ownership or of all private initiative—a view which both the emotional defenders of capitalism as it is and the emotional sponsors of collectivistic systems of economy seem to hold. More of this later.

The Ideal of Service

Under the Christian ideal of business for service, economic activity would aim primarily at the satisfaction of the basic needs of all the members of society, and not primarily at the private maximum profit of select individuals. Under this ideal, there would necessarily be less concentration as also less making of articles of second or third rate importance in regard to satisfaction of human needs. Where this ideal is accepted by society at large, there would be very little tolerance of the type of stock speculation that has so little to do with promotion of exchange of goods for social weal, and that is aimed not at the good of society but at a maximum satisfying of the greed of alert individuals at the expense of their fellow citizens. Advertising, for instance, would be a matter of

information rather than subtle persuasion or even misinformation.

The whole enterprise of economic production would be gauged primarily by the needs and demands of consumption. The needs of human nature are there, not in order to be suppressed, but to be supplied and satisfied under control of human reason and in accordance with the higher purposes of human life. Basic in life is the fulfilment of needs; over and above is the very legitimate enjoyment of goods that enhance the pleasure of life. By saying that production must serve human needs, it is not meant that all production must be restricted to goods supplying actual needs, but rather that the production of such goods receive priority over production of goods that merely give comfort or pleasure.

It is likewise meant that the amount of production should be commensurate with the amount of need and of consequent demand. When viewed in the light of the natural purpose of economic production, the practice of curtailing production artificially below natural demand and needs is a logical absurdity. And when such curtailment occurs to the detriment of the common good and is motivated by the personal greed of individualistic beneficiaries, the logical absurdity becomes an ethical enormity. If production were really carried on for consumption, that is, were directed and regulated for serving the needs of society, it would be well

nigh impossible to have a condition of possible plenty together with actual scarcity endure for any length of time.

“Is the final purpose of industry and business the making of money,” asked Sherwood Eddy long ago, “or the making of men? Should the ultimate motive in industry be private profit or public service? Should the method of industry be *laissez-faire* competition or growing cooperation? Should the dominating spirit of industry be the rule of gold or the golden rule?” There is only one answer possible to each of these questions in terms of Christian principles. And it is only under the influence of Christian principles that a gradual reconstruction in the direction of that answer can be achieved in such a way that all legitimate human values and rights alike are properly preserved.

6. CHRISTIAN OWNERSHIP

ARTICLES of preceding series have analyzed the all-important position held by the institution of private ownership or private property in our capitalistic civilization. Under the inspiration of a selfish and un-Christian individualism, private ownership of anything was considered in itself an absolute right. Much was said of the sacredness of property in a generation that had officially repudiated all ideals of traditional Christian sanctity. Since liberalism acknowledged no ethical laws that are really superior to the will of man, the right of property was subject to no moral restrictions. It was not only unlimited but also untouchable. Every owner could do with his property what he wished, so that we have even witnessed the destruction of eatables on their very way to market by the owners themselves for the sake of diminishing abundance and thus increasing the possibility of private profit. Why not, if private ownership is absolute and entirely individualistic?

Twofold Character of Ownership

No such absolute right of ownership can be reconciled with the Christian ideal of social solidarity, which is as remote from anti-social

individualism as it is from anti-individual collectivism of any kind. The Christian concept of ownership has been thus briefly expressed in the *Quadragesimo Anno*, in reference to the twofold danger arising out of these extremes: "There is, therefore, a double danger to be avoided. On the one hand, if the social and public aspect of ownership be denied or minimized, the logical consequence is individualism, as it is called; on the other hand, the rejection or diminution of its private and individual character necessarily leads to some form of collectivism."

In all question of ownership, therefore, as in all questions of human life, the double aspect of things human must ever be kept in mind, the individual and the social; and they must be correlated and harmonized for the proper attainment of the ideals of social solidarity. The basis of all right of ownership rests in the general purpose of material goods or material wealth. In the words of the *Quadragesimo Anno*, which here begin with a quotation from Leo XIII, "The earth even though apportioned amongst private owners ceases not thereby to minister to the needs of all." This teaching we ourselves have reaffirmed above when we wrote that the division of goods which is effected by private ownership is ordained by nature itself and has for its purpose that created things may minister to man's needs in orderly and stable fashion."

Hierarchical Order

The absolute right to ownership fostered by individualism must be supplanted by a proper hierarchical ordering of human rights, according to which the right to life is superior in a general way over the right to ownership, and according to which in particular the right of some men to a decent livelihood is superior to the right of others to abundant wealth.

Much of the abuse connected with the failure of individualism to realize this rational order of things comes from the fact that ownership, passive or absentee ownership, is looked upon as *per se* productive.

No material things are really productive apart from nature and from the human energies expended on them or used in their control. The productiveness of property is always in last analysis due to human labor both of brain and of brawn.

Ideal Set-up

The ideal set-up according to Christian principles would abolish absentee ownership, or else accord profits only to active ownership. This would obtain to the fullest extent whenever the human agents of production are also the owners of the materials on which they work and of the instruments with which they do their work. Only under such conditions are all the causal factors of economic wealth so joined together that all the increased economic values,

or the profits, can also be distributed to those who have actually contributed something of themselves to the products achieved. The according of dividends or profits to passive or absentee owners has in practice resulted in the establishment of a privileged class, which tended more and more to assume the status of social parasites.

The restriction of profits to active ownership, however, would in no way mean that borrowed capital should not receive a *quid-pro-quo* for the money or materials lent to the active owners and agents of production. It would therefore not mean the abolishing of investment in bonds, or payment of rent or interest. This is said without being intended as any taking of issue on the question of interest. The entire problem of money must be reserved for later treatment.

For the present it must suffice to state that the abolition of profits to absentee owners, small as the change might seem, would have far-reaching consequences in our economic life. For the latter is now subject to an impersonal and absolute economic dictatorship. And one of the chief supports of this dictatorship, if not the main basis, is just the established connection between profits and ownership and control of stocks. Such connection, in fact, makes possible the artificial over-evaluation of stocks and the fluctuations in value that are the delight of the financial gambler of our day.

Nothing here said can be justly taken to oppose the institution of private ownership. In accordance with a right understanding of social solidarity, Christianity favors both individual and corporate ownership of material goods. But such ownership is always conditioned, since ownership is a means and never an end in itself. It is always properly instrumental towards the attainment of the good life by individuals, of the common good of all, of the material and moral perfection of mankind. Insofar as private ownership favors these three kinds of good, Christianity will ever defend it; whenever private ownership turns to egoism and greed and becomes hostile to these kinds of good, Christianity must condemn the abuses and set to the ownership its proper limits.

7. HUMAN PERSONALITY

ONE of the most telling criticisms against capitalistic industrialism is the statement and the fact that it has tended to dehumanize men. We have seen how in point of fact labor holds merely the position of a market commodity that is offered or bid for like other wares, entirely on the competitive basis and from the standpoint of costs. There is not the open selling of human beings such as obtained formerly on the slave markets; yet the economic stress of the average laborers, and their economic helplessness, has forced them into bargains that they could not possibly consider as harmonizing with the dignity of man. Insofar as the slaves of old were cared for by their masters also in times of unemployment, the modern laborer's lot has often been worse than that of the slave.

Equally beneath the dignity of human personality has been much of the factory labor performed with machinery. Instead of dominating the machine, the laborer is subject to the pace set and the demands made by the machinery in action and himself is reduced to a mere cog in a gigantic mechanism.

Labor and Human Values

Human labor must at all times be made to accord with the dignity of human nature as

far as possible, and should be surrounded with conditions that have a natural appeal to the general traits of human personality. Where the extreme divisions of labor make for monotony, dullness, there the labor must again be conjoined with conditions that help the working man to retain his self-respect. The uncertainty of holding or losing his job must be removed for one thing, and in some way the work, however mechanical, must again become also a source of satisfaction or joy; it must be a source of self-realization for the workingman and thus respond to and satisfy a fundamental trait in man. If this is possible only at the expense of the mechanical efficiency that has for so long been our pride, society must make up its mind to sacrifice some of this efficiency for the preservation of human self-respect. Only too long has it tolerated the sacrifice of all human dignity and human values for the sake of mechanical perfection.

Something of legitimate pride will be restored to workers, no matter how dulling and mechanical their contribution to the entire productive enterprise, by restoring to them a proper sense of ownership. No workers should be permanently connected with any business enterprise without having some share in the ownership of it. And if this means that the workers must also carry some part of the risk that was formerly borne by the capitalists alone, this is not at all a moral evil. On the contrary the risk will

but enhance their sense of personal responsibility, just as their sharing in profits will enhance their self-respect. That many workers today need to be educated up to this viewpoint is no objection to the ideal set-up; it is rather a reflection on the degree to which the mechanization of human labor in the past has permanently affected the natural aspirations of human nature in their case.

Full Partnership

Together with a share in ownership should come some share in management. Human dignity demands that each person be able as much as possible to determine the extent and the scope of his own efforts, to direct and control them himself, to exercise self-determination in all he does. The realization of this ideal again needs much education because all classes of men have been so thoroughly imbued with the principles of individualism instead of principles of social solidarity and mutual cooperation and charity. This does not mean that anyone connected with an industry is capable of and should at some time exercise the management of the industry. It means first of all that, within the scope of his own contributive labor and in regard to the conditions and regulations surrounding his own labor, each man should have a deciding voice, should be allowed to express his opinion and discuss it with his fellows in the full consciousness that right reason will prevail. Even the

lowliest laborer in any enterprise should be able, within his own sphere, to feel and to exercise something of the mastery and direction that is man's right over material nature.

There are many and various incentives that should find some realization in all work, over and above the economic one of gaining a livelihood. Such are, for instance, the wish to benefit humanity, joy of work, satisfaction in contributing to worthwhile enterprises, pleasure in cooperating with one's fellows, pride in a finished product of quality. There is no need to ask to what extent these incentives are allowed to exercise themselves when a person feels himself an insecure element in a huge mechanism or organization, in which he has not the slightest word or say in any degree, from which he may be cut off at any moment for no reason that he can understand, and upon which he must always look as something that has neither understanding of human nature nor sympathy for human aspirations.

The change in this regard from being a mere market commodity to being a sharer in ownership, a cooperator in a general enterprise, a joint controller or manager in however small a degree, may seem slight, but psychologically and morally it is immense. It is but part and parcel of the general change that human society must undergo if it hopes to escape the full disintegrating effects of stark individualism on the

one hand, or the social enslavement of the totalitarian state on the other.

With this general change must also come the more social division of labor time, such a shortening of hours as is made possible by our technical advances. The benefits of this condition must also be spread proportionately to all members of human society, so that all may have the chance to enjoy greater leisure for the pursuit of the higher things of life. Whether all would use this leisure properly or not, is not to the point in our question. They all have the right to it, just as they all have the duty of using it for such higher purposes. This is but another aspect of the general re-education and re-orientation that is needed to get us out of the arid ruts of individualistic materialism.

8. VOLUNTARY COOPERATION

UNDER individualism all human conduct in society follows the principle of free competition, so that life, economic life in particular, has become a struggle of all against all. As this struggle continues all but the favored few gradually lose true freedom of action by reason of their economic helplessness and dependence. In the fully developed totalitarian state, such as is the logical outcome of unmitigated fascism, socialism, or communism, the basic principle of human conduct is that of complete obedience to the state or the collective community. Here, too, personal freedom is non-existent, not only practically but also in accepted theory. There is here no opportunity for personal development, for initiative, for expression of individuality—except through gracious concession of the powers that be.

Basis of Free Cooperation

Over against such views the principle of Christian solidarity can only be that of voluntary cooperation in contrast to the enforced cooperation of present-day communism. Such voluntary cooperation is possible only where human beings are free to act upon their own determination. The requisite freedom of action

for such voluntary cooperation in turn is had only where men are economically free, that is, not in a state of complete dependence on the good will of others for the necessary means of decent living. Freedom of action in human society is impossible without such a minimum of economic independence. This necessarily implies a sufficient degree of ownership, or at least a ready access at all times to sufficient material goods for the ordinary satisfaction of all human needs. That is why those who work for the re-establishment of Christian solidarity also uphold the principle of the maximum distribution of ownership among men. From this standpoint their ideal is frequently called the distributist society, or the proprietary state.

To arrive at this ideal it will be essential to decentralize economic power as well as ownership. Whether such decentralization is possible, without losing the advantages of centralized organization on the large scale such as we now have it in the economic field, is a question for the future to solve. Our present-day centralization of both ownership and control of wealth is the direct result of extreme competitive individualism which is thus self-defeating. There is no *a priori* reason why adequate external organization should not be possible with decentralized ownership. Certainly the spirit of Christian solidarity itself demands some kind of organized cooperation or cooperative organization. Just as certainly the establishment of such co-

operation together with decentralized ownership is impossible under complete individualism. What is really possible under the ideals of Christian solidarity in our modern technological economy no one can know until experience makes the trial. Yet again a real trial cannot be made until the ideals of Christian solidarity have again been more generally accepted by men. That is why the basic work in the reconstruction of society must be the rebirth in mankind of Christian ideals. If these take root sufficiently the questions of external organization of economic and political life will gradually solve itself.

Hierarchy of Service

Any organization of industry or of human society on the principle of voluntary cooperation will necessarily reduce to a minimum all mechanization of human life, and avoid entirely the deadening effects of a mathematical equalization of all men, as well as the straight-laced division of men into classes or strata. Voluntary cooperation among men is only possible where the natural differences in human abilities, zeal, good will, etc., are taken into account. It is as unnatural to consider all men equal in abilities as it is to consider men incapable of improvement, or all capable of equal improvement or development. Christian solidarity therefore must recognize differences in men; but these differences are based first of all on abilities and good

will, which are themselves to be evaluated greatly in terms of social service. The man who in developing his abilities and opportunities at the same time contributes best to the common good, to social stability and advance, must be accorded the highest social rank. The hierarchy of Christian solidarity is not one of birth or of amassed wealth or even of power to organize or dominate, but of service to the common weal. Needless to say, intellectual and moral contributions must count for more than purely material ones. The school teacher, for instance, in a community will enjoy a higher social esteem among Christians than the "successful" business man of the individualistic type; and under Christian ideals we should even arrive at a stage in which the professor of philosophy receives a higher pay at state universities than the director of athletics.

If there is thus a new hierarchy of values and of social esteem created in a Christian society, the relative position of any member in society will never be automatically fixed to remain what it is. Social position will then depend on success in realizing the common ideals. The opportunity will always be open to anyone to advance by reason of ability and merit. In other words, the fixed status of earlier times will give way to a flexible differentiation, a dynamic or fluid hierarchical order among men over against a static or ever-widening stratification of classes.

To the writer it seems that this general idea is behind the type of occupation grouping mentioned in the *Quadragesimo Anno*. Our present system of labor unions is horizontal, and it tends to stress the division of men into economic strata. Even the company union does this on a local scale, with the result moreover that these unions lose whatever strength and advantage they might have from a nationwide union. An occupational group is rather a voluntary union of all who have part in the same profession or industrial enterprise. It is not a union of antagonistic employers and employed, but rather a union of greater or less partnership between them, based on the principle of voluntary cooperation between free human beings. Within the scope of its aim, *i.e.*, of the purposes of its economic activity, it would reflect as far as possible the social organization of the family, and it would be within its own scope a small reflection of what the larger human society should be under the ideals of Christian solidarity.

9. ECONOMIC PLANNING

WE hear much today about economic planning and its great need amid the chaotic conditions of our economic life today. There is no common general system of such planning proposed. The schemes vary from the simplest agency for the planning of production to the most complete and all-embracing nationwide state-planning of all economic activities. The schemes propose in general to do away with the inequalities of capitalism, with its recurrent failure as evidenced in the cyclic depressions that seem to increase in intensity as they recur in the course of time. One and all, the plans aim at the satisfaction of human needs. They attempt to rationalize all human life towards that end, just as capitalism rationalizes all towards the accumulation and investment of profits.

Economic planning as such is not a new thing. It has always been practiced by capitalistic monopolies, even on a nationwide scale, though naturally for their own purposes.

All socialist schemes of reconstruction include national planning for the maximum distribution of economic goods among the masses of men. They are concerned not so much with such things as government projects for bridging over periods of industrial unemployment, but rather

with the avoidance of these as of all other crises, as also the avoidance of all types of overproduction or underconsumption.

Basis for Planning

The question of economic planning must be resolved in terms of the true nature of society and the true purposes of life. Many schemes seem to look upon society as a gigantic physical machine, the whole purpose of which is a maximum economic efficiency. Such a view of society harmonizes with the materialistic and the deterministic philosophy that has been so much in favor with all forms of collectivism. For the Christian, on the other hand, human society, large or small, is rather like an organism, that is partly material and partly spiritual, in which the material is subservient to the spiritual, and in which the spiritual human values must never be sacrificed to the material, or to anything like purely mechanical efficiency.

A machine works only when all its parts are perfectly adapted. The parts have no individual purposes of their own, they are mechanically and absolutely fitted to the whole. If a part goes wrong the entire machine must at once stop functioning; no machine can continue to function under the circumstances, much less can it at the same time repair its own broken part. If society were but a mechanical entity of that kind, then it could indeed be properly ordered by means of a gigantic, all-embracing blue-

print plan, and there would be all reason for following the plan with perfect efficiency.

However human society is rather like a human organism, with the one difference that its ultimate parts are self-directive persons. The larger all-embracing society is constituted of smaller and smaller organic units (communities, associations, etc.) and these in turn of families and then of individual persons. On all these levels the individuals or the units have a life of their own, which they must develop in cooperation with their fellows or their fellow units, for their own good and at the same time for the common good of all. Just as living organism harmonizes all the activities of its constituent parts, and just as the whole comes to the rescue of injured parts, so can society function properly only by mutual cooperation of all parts, and by going to the assistance of members in distress when these need help.

There is no perfect mechanical efficiency possible here, and there must be constant adjustment to needs of parts or to needs of the whole. This condition can obtain only in a system of voluntary cooperation under ideals of Christian solidarity, that is, a system in which individuals and social units have a maximum of independence and self-direction in their own development and in their contributions to the common good.

Cooperative Planning

Economic planning in such a society, which is the best natural one for man, cannot impose a complete all-embracing economic plan upon man from above by sheer force of totalitarian authority. For then the highest aspects and values of human life would be ruled out automatically. Economic planning must rather as far as possible arise from within the individual industrial groups, themselves organized according to the ideals of Christian solidarity.

Any absolute government-imposed plan for regulating production at once goes much farther than might at first seem evident. An all-embracing plan of this kind would ultimately imply also the prescription for all people of what they may eat and wear, at least negatively so, of the kind of houses they must be content to live in, and the like. As soon as people refuse to consume some of the types of goods planned for them, the state-imposed plan fails or else resort must be had to force. On the other hand, any freedom in consumption of goods also demands a proportionate flexibility and adjustability in production. And this is had only if production can be, in great degree at least, regulated from within the productive units.

There is much talk today of fixing the just price. This is highly desirable; but, again, it must be done from within the economic units, else the ideals of Christian solidarity will not be attainable. No government can fix a just

price apart from the industries in question. Proper prices as also proper profit margins can be decided only from within the industrial groups, though with proper consultation of all parties concerned. Else these groups lose all their legitimate independence. Else also the legitimate competition that makes for improved output would otherwise disappear, and with it the rewarding of improved abilities, of productive skill, of ingenuity, of elimination of waste in production, etc.

Successful planning ceases to be human when imposed by force from on top. It is human only when self-determined to a large degree. But the self-determination will be cooperative and in harmony with both individual and common good only when the ideals of both distributive justice and social justice, and charity as well, are again accepted as having the status of moral law.

10. DECENTRALIZATION

SOMETHING has already been said in a general way about decentralization in this series. The trend from the farm to the city is a result of the industrial revolution, and of the ever greater concentration of industrial production in chosen centers. What that has meant in the way of city slums and of a general massing of men in centers of completely mechanized life, and in the way of disrupting real family life, need not be dwelt upon here.

In many ways the centralization of various industries has gone on even to the economic detriment of the majority, *i.e.*, of both consumers and retailers, not to speak of the smaller business rivals that were put out of existence in the process of competition. It has had only one advantage, and that from the one angle from which capitalistic rationalization of the economic life has proceeded—the greater elimination of running expenses and the consequent increase of profits.

Advantages of Decentralization

We have nowhere gone into details or particulars to any extent in our general discussion of principles. But an example may perhaps serve best to show the economic advantages that may

accrue to the general public, and therefore to the common good from decentralization of some industries—which economic advantages are just of the kind that would help to realize the ideals of Christian solidarity.

The number of slaughtering and meat-packing centers that constitute ninety per cent of the wholesale meat industry are very few for a country as large as the United States. The fewer there are the farther must shipment be made of the animals destined for slaughter and likewise the farther must the finished products be again sent out to reach the consumers. There is here an immense waste of energy and expense because of this double shipping. There is no reason of public advantage worth mentioning for concentrating this industry in so few centers instead of spreading it about far and wide in many smaller centers.

The principle that is here involved of decentralization is almost endless in its application to other industries, especially since the advent of electricity has eliminated reasons for concentration that may have obtained formerly, such as the erection of plants as near as possible to sources of power, either water or coal.

Nor does decentralization today affect greatly the possibility of common cooperative action, or of pursuance of common policies. The same means of modern communication that have enabled industrial barons to control vast regions

centrally can also be used for cooperative action on the part of scattered groups.

There is a similar point to be made for decentralization of city congestion. One of the arguments of the past against such decentralization has been the great advantages the city offers in the way of modern comforts of life and modern facilities of all kinds over against the country. People had to congregate where these facilities could be offered if they wished to enjoy them. But the advance of modern technology has now made possible also the spreading about of most of the comforts and facilities of modern living, just as it has made possible the spreading out of smaller centers of industry and manufacture. The possibilities in this regard have hardly begun being exploited, since it has been to the advantage of the controlling few in our individualistic society to keep life centralized for the better concentration of profits.

Once the technicians use the same energy and ingenuity for inventing and constructing mechanical devices that will spread the now concentrated facilities far and wide, the trend towards a more natural type of life closer to nature will be more easily realizable. That this is most fully in accordance with the relative independence and freedom of individuals, families and groups, as demanded by a more Christian ideal of life, need hardly be mentioned.

Further Considerations

Decentralized industrial activity together with decentralized home life would both work for the ideals of the distributive or proprietary society. It would help to center the objectives of economic activity more on the general good, first of all on the home country, rather than on foreign markets. It would tend to help realize the primary aim of economic life, the attainment as widespread as possible, of sufficiency and abundance at home. Under individualistic capitalism there is no assignable reason why home markets might not be grossly neglected, and industrial activity centered on foreign markets, provided larger profits could be thus derived. Yet the common good of any country demands that the primary objective of its economic life be the maximum satisfaction of all needs of its own members. Foreign commerce must always play a secondary rôle in this regard, in so far as its sole justification is the attainment of the greater common good by supplementing the possibilities and activities of home industry. The development of foreign commerce of any kind to the detriment of the common economic good at home is not only unintelligible in terms of the ideals of Christian solidarity, but also a complete perversion of the right order of things.

Another problem to which the ideal of decentralization must be applied is that of finance. So far in our "Ideals of Reconstruction" nothing has been said of the all-important question

of money. This was not an oversight. From the economic standpoint, it seems quite true that the most important angle of the social question is that of money. And no attempt at reconstruction will avail that does not also deal with the financial structure or set-up of modern life. This is so important a matter that a separate series on the Social Question has been projected, in which the question of money will be dealt with in terms of the ideals of Christian solidarity as outlined in the present series. Before that, however, a series will deal with various schemes of reconstruction that are being tried or proposed today for the attainment of a better life.

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