

The Catholic Church and the Workers

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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE WORKER

ARCHBISHOP MAURICE ROY

On the occasion of this Labour Day celebration you wished to assemble in this church in order to pray to your patron, St. Joseph and to ask of the Divine Worker help to understand the lessons and the examples which He Himself gave you when He worked on Earth. It is the Church that has pointed there lessons out to you in the course of the centuries, with that divine authority bestowed by her Founder: it is the Church that is inspired by them in the various organizations which she has founded to sanctify the labouring class.

The Church is a Mother

First I would like to recall to you that the Church has done for you. The Church is a mother — she loves all her children equally. She counts among her sons men of all races, government leaders and governed employers and employees. But She belongs neither to any one country nor to any one class of society. To all She shows the road to Heaven, to all She reveals the Truth. This truth is welcomed sometimes with joy, sometimes with sadness; now She points out rights which one is happy to defend, now obligations painful to accept. Like that of our Saviour the word of the Church is at times most pleasant to hear but at times it appears extremely severe. The Church does not seek first of all to please, but to speak the Truth. She wants all men, great and small, powerful or weak, rich or poor, guided by the teachings of Christ, to work together as brothers for the edification of a Christian Society.

Her Predilection for the Working Class

But, though she loves all her children with the same love, a mother shows a particular solicitude for her younger and weaker children because they have more need of her attention and care. That is why the Church has turned with predilection towards the working class so frequently without guidance and protection when confronting the powerful associations of commerce and industry. As modern institutions developed and the relations of capital and labour became more

and more complex, the voice of the Popes was heard insisting more and more on the necessity of having the spirit of the Gospel penetrate into and expand in the World of Labour.

In other countries, the Church has been blamed for not having the interests of the labourers sufficiently at heart, and for not siding the working class enough in the creation of those associations which were needed. If this happened, it was not because the Church did not wish to help the working class but because the means of assistance had been removed. Indeed, in many countries, those who exploited the workers are those who persecuted the Church. And it is because She was deprived of her liberty to teach and to promote good works, because her clergy was curtailed to a small number and her resources too precarious that the Church has not been able to accomplish all the projects of her social program.

Her Role of Pioneer in our Country

Nevertheless, the Church has accomplished an admirable task in our country. It was She that went to the employers and the workers inviting them to organize professional groups. This was an extremely difficult task. The oldest among you will remember how the first chaplains and officers of these associations succeeded in overcoming the indifference, the prejudices and the hostility of a great number. We now see the results of their efforts. We have to-day in conformity with the teachings of His Holiness, Pope Pius XI, workers' associations and employers' associations which collaborate loyally in the realization of a Christian Social order.

The Church has Confidence in the Leaders of the Union Associations

The Church indicates to these associations the course to follow but She does not intend to interfere in the details of their administrations; She respects their autonomy and has confidence in their leaders. If a dispute arises the Church ordinarily avoids pronouncing on the grounds of the conflict as the mother of a family avoids taking sides when a discussion arises between her children. But, on the other hand, She does not hesitate to exercise her right to teach the truth and to safeguard the existence and the liberty of the professional associations which She founded.

Archbishop Maurice Roy has kindly authorized the Industrial Relations Bulletin to publish, as an article, the masterly address he delivered on Labour Day.

Responsibility of the Workers

Here then, dear Workers, is what the Church has done for you. But you understand very well that She can succeed in this work only if you cooperate generously. Work, whose dignity and fruitfulness the Church points out, it is you that must do it; the associations which She has organized for you, it is you that must maintain them; the high ideal of a busy and Christian life for which She has mapped out the programme, it is you that must live it.

Competence and Integrity

How are you to do your share? First of all by learning thoroughly your trade. You will not respect your profession if you act as though you believed it could be practised without intelligence or application. Thanks to the aid of machinery many trades are easier to learn to-day than they formerly were. But, in every field there remains always a difference easy to perceive between the labourer who knows his trade and he who works poorly. The ignorant or lazy doctor, engineer, or lawyer is a disgrace to his profession; the same is true of the worker who is not competent or honest in his job.

If you appreciate, as does the Church, the dignity of your profession, you can understand that your unions cannot give a certificate of competence to one who does not know his trade as well as it can to a skilled workman. You will endeavour to waste neither the materials entrusted to you nor your time. If, by his own fault, a workman loses time for which he is paid, he sins against justice just as much as the employer who pays only a part of the wages promised, just as much as the merchant who cheats in weighing out the merchandise he sells. Be competent, be honest. Thus will you bring honour to your profession.

The Workers must Maintain their Unions

The Church has encouraged and helped you to form unions: take an active part in these associations and support them. The unions have helped you to improve your condition and have obtained better wages for you; that is one of the reasons for their existence, since the Church wants the worker, through the professional association, to know what his rights are and to have a fair share in the general prosperity.

But if you want your unions to help you, you too must help them not only once in a while, but

all year around. You should not remember that you belong to a profession only when it is a question of obtaining an increase in wages; you must be proud of your profession and desirous of helping your fellows all the time.

Your unions can help you in many ways. And the officers of your associations have told you more than once that they want to obtain for you not only reasonable wages but also all that would permit you to make a better use of the money you earn, all that would provide a happier and more Christian life for you and your families. But, to accomplish this task your associations must be able to count on your collaboration and your faithfulness. Thus only they can make plans for the future and be in a position to render ever-increasing service.

Necessity of Studying the Social Doctrines of the Church

Do you give sufficient study to the social doctrines which inspired the founders of your unions? Do not imagine that only the officers and the chaplains of your associations are capable of studying what the Church teaches on social questions. You all can and should learn what the Church asks you to know. Everytime there is a conference or a study group on social questions in your union or under the auspices of a parochial society, make it your duty to be present. The better you know the doctrine of the Church, the better you will know what you should do to live in a Christian way by doing good around you.

Aim of Workers' Christian Movement

Hearken well to the Church in order to direct your action always towards the goal She sets for you. This goal, His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, pointed out in an admirable manner in his speech to Italian workers June 29, 1948. Let us listen with respect to his words: «Not to falter by the wayside, to fire their hearts and particularly to win over the young to your cause you must keep constantly before your eyes the high aim towards which your movement tends — that is to say, the training of really christian workers who would excel equally in their capability to carry on their art as well as in religious integrity, who would know how to keep a perfect harmony between their economic interests and a strict sense of justice and a sincere desire to collaborate with other classes of society in the renewal of the Christian spirit throughout the entire social framework. (see *Quadragesimo Anno*).

Such is the lofty ideal of the Christian Workers' Movement even when it is divided into separate and distinct unions of which some aim at the defence of their legitimate interests by labour contracts — the proper task of unions — while some aim at works of mutual assistance in economic matters, such as the consumer's co-operatives, others again have a religious and moral object such as the catholic workers' associations.

Do not let yourselves be drawn away from this end which is more important than any transitory form of union organization ».

The august words of our Sovereign Pontiff

have shown you your duty. Above all else be perfect christians. The most noble institutions will never succeed in having peace reign when men seek only for money and pleasure. It is those who are detached from the goods of this world who spread well-being around them. It is those who look to Heaven who do the most good on earth. « Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and all these things will be added unto you ». (Mat. VI-33.) In order to bestow some peace and happiness to the world we live in, let us diffuse in the field of Labour the spirit of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

ORIGIN AND ADVANCES IN SOCIAL LEGISLATION: GENERAL LAWS AND CLASS LAWS

RENÉ H. MANKIEWICZ

The Fallacy of the French Revolution: Equality retains Inequality

The principal progress realized by European countries in the field of rights following the French Revolution consisted of the abolition of class privileges. Equality of men under the law was the essential innovation of the new liberal regime. It ensured the disappearance of corporative and feudal privileges. Henceforward, everybody would be treated on an equal footing legally. No longer would the rights and obligations of man vary according to his « social condition ». In the place of class privileges were installed laws common to all.

Now, the development of political liberalism combined with liberal economy demonstrated, in the course of the nineteenth and particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century, that this new general law was built on an illusion. Equality of legal treatment actually proved the most efficient means of securing inequality of social conditions. It perpetuated privileges which were thought to be abolished. It showed itself unable to assure the triumph of justice, especially of social justice.

As a matter of fact, men are not equally armed in the fight for daily bread. The possession of wealth and of the material means of production bestow a real superiority in relation to other people. So that neither equal laws nor social justice are any longer guaranteed.

The Remedy: Legal Protection of Workers

As always in similar conditions, juridical order should then intervene to protect the man inadequately armed against the power of his fellows and to attenuate the effect of the force whether it be physical, military or, as here, economic. Consequently, the general law should be broken with and a return made to the traditional system where the legal norms were modelled on the social condition of those concerned. Legal inequality becomes again the standard of the law maker. But, this time, inequality operates to the profit of the disinherited and no longer, as under the old regime, to consolidate the possession of privileges.

Disciplinary Rules in Industrial Establishments

This re-establishment has been long in coming. It needed more than a century of battling before there were union organizations capable of defending the interests of the working man against financial and economic authority. Meanwhile the governments had been unable to preside peacefully over the exploitation of the workers by often unscrupulous entrepreneurs nor to remain inactive at the time of strikes and revolts which, although often legitimate, were nonetheless prejudicial to the interests of the nation.

But, instead of regulating the rights of the workers, governments of the nineteenth century