

SOCIAL CATHOLICISM AND CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY,

Pius IX's successor, Leo XIII (1878-1903), was not a liberal Catholic but a widely traveled diplomat and deeply sensitive scholar who knew that it was absolutely imperative for the Church to meet the real needs of the age and break out of the state of siege mentality so much a part of its history since the Enlightenment. In contrast with Pius IX's reign, his pontificate was one long and somewhat successful effort to place the Church on a new footing in regard to modern secular culture. He tried to wean the French Catholics away from their alliance with the moribund monarchists. He restored good relations with Germany after the Kulturkampf (Bismarck's effort to destroy the Church's political and social influence). Leo tried to update the Church intellectually in line with the progress of biblical and historical research-instituting a biblical commission and opening the Vatican archives to historians. But his most enduring claim to the Church's gratitude was the leadership he gave in regard to the new problems created by the Industrial Revolution. His encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) was the Magna Carta of social Catholicism, the movement that more than any other within the Church gradually forced Catholics out of their medievalism and state of siege mentality and inspired them to grapple realistically with the problems of the twentieth century.

Social Catholicism was the response of the Church to new conditions of society caused by the Industrial Revolution and the advent of the mass society. The latter part of the nineteenth century witnessed a remarkable leap forward in the self-awareness and political and social consciousness of the masses, who previously had taken little part in the decision making that shaped their lives.

The most important factor in bringing the masses to power, no doubt, was industrialization-the progressive mechanization and concentration of production methods, which began first in Great Britain in the textile factories at the end of the eighteenth century. It quickly transformed the British way of life. Modes of travel and communication were revolutionized after 1825 by the railway and

electric telegraph. The European continent followed suit, though it lagged behind a full generation, remaining predominantly agrarian during the first half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, by 1851 many of the major European cities were linked to each other by railroads.

The age of Leo XIII saw the real debut of mass society and culture: It was the age of industrial barons-the Rockefellers, Camegies, Krupps, and Nobels-whose steel and coal factories set the pace. The extent can be gauged by the fantastic spread of railroads, which in the United States leaped from 70,000 miles in 1873 to 193,000 by 1900. Europe by comparison reached 172,000 by 1900, while the world total amounted to 600,000 miles. This industrialization brought great numbers of people off the land and herded them into congested areas of smoky factories and dingy streets in a way that made the average person peculiarly susceptible to mass suggestion and mass action.

The emergence of the masses was also due to several other factors. One was the unprecedented growth in population which set in about 1760 and continued throughout the nineteenth century. Europe's population rose from 140 million in 1740 to 188 million in 1800 to 266 million in 1850 increasing again by 130 million during the next 50 years, not counting the great numbers who emigrated abroad. Another factor was the rise of popular education and the growth of literacy. As late as the 1860s the vast majority of Europeans were still illiterate. But by 1900 illiteracy was virtually wiped out in northern and western Europe; by that date around 95 per cent of the population could read and write. Less success was registered in south-central Europe, where half of the Italians, for example, were still unable to read, and there was hardly any success as yet in eastern Europe. In close relationship with the growth of mass literacy there arose popular journalism; the daily newspaper fed the appetites of the millions for excitement and sensation and was molded by and helped mold their opinions, prejudices, and tastes. Finally, the advent of democracy gave political power to the masses when the vote was extended to all adult males in most countries of Europe during the

latter part of the century although with certain qualifications.

Leaders of the Church realized that if it was to survive in this new situation and have any effective influence over the masses, it would have to make important adaptations, in particular, It would have to accept the liberal techniques: freedom of the press, democratic constitutions, separation of Church and state, and civil liberties, including freedom of religion and trade unions. Therefore, although his predecessor resisted accommodation to the modern world and condemned these things as the expression of liberalism, the flexible and clear-sighted Leo XIII made distinctions that made it possible for Catholics to accept the techniques of liberalism without subscribing to its philosophy. As he said in his encyclical *Libertas* in 1888, it was a vain and baseless calumny to accuse the Church of looking unfavorably on most modern Political systems and of rejecting all the discoveries of contemporary genius. In this spirit Leo began the work of reconciling the Church with the modern world and led the Church in taking a firm grip on the problems of modern mass society.

the most crucial problem generated by the new industrialized mass society was the social question: the problem of the exploited and oppressed factory worker. As Thomas Carlyle said in 1843, "I venture to believe that in no time since the beginnings of society, was the lot of those same dumb millions of toilers so entirely unbearable as it is even in the days now passing over us." Poverty and misery were, of course, not something new; but as Carlyle realized, the ancient poverty and misery was actually worsened by the coming of machinery. Statistics show that whereas in the sixteenth century the lowest class, the "poor" who lived on the brink of starvation, numbered one fifth of the population, in the nineteenth century they had increased to a third or more. Moreover, there is good evidence that the average worker-a millhand, for example-could barely earn enough to support a family with three children, even when he was fully employed. Conditions in the new factories and slums were abominable. Men as well as women and children (boys and girls under eighteen regularly made up half of the labor force)

were forced to work twelve to fifteen hours a day at wages kept to a minimum. They could be laid off at any time without warning. They were obliged to spend 60 to 80 per cent of their income on their diet, which consisted of only bread and potatoes and an occasional cabbage. Their bare subsistence wages allowed them no margin for savings, and when they were laid off they would be in immediate danger of starving. They lived with their whole family in a single room in a dirty tenement and were lucky if they didn't have to share it with other families. The squalid streets around them were littered with garbage, and being without adequate sewers, they reeked with the smell of excrement.

It was only slowly that Catholics began to take cognizance of the "social question" and to begin the combination of reflection and action that gave rise to social Catholicism. Here as elsewhere, Lamennais anticipated later developments in the Church by his perceptive analysis of the worker problems and his attempt to stir up Catholic interest in the social question. In order for social Catholicism to emerge, two conditions were necessary. First, Catholics had to take cognizance of the exceptional gravity of the social problems and the need to talk no longer of the poor but of poverty and to undertake collective action for reform rather than trusting to individual charity. Secondly, there had to be a sufficiently optimistic attitude toward the future that would encourage the formulation of theoretical solutions and practical proposals. The outstanding initiatives were taken in Germany, Belgium, Italy, and France, with the German Catholics leading the way. A German bishop, Wilhelm Ketteler (1811-77), as early as 1848 faced squarely the problem of the factory worker in sermons and books. He sketched out a Catholic solution that he marked off from both socialism and sectarian liberalism, pointing out the dangers in both the unlimited competition of liberal capitalism and the exaggerated state control of the socialists. He defended the right of state intervention against the liberal capitalists and the right of private property against the totalitarian tendencies of the socialists. Above all, he insisted on the right of workers to form their own associations, and he called for a whole series of reforms, including

profit sharing, reasonable working hours, sufficient rest days, factory inspection, and the regulation of female and child labor. In 1869 he told the German bishops at Fulda that the social question was more acute and serious than any other, and he gave a powerful exposition of what had to be done to deal with it effectively.

Other Catholic leaders appeared who tried to organize the workers and to alleviate their miseries. But their ideas failed to penetrate the mass of their fellow Catholics, while they themselves were handicapped by antiquated ideas and attitudes. They remained essentially precapitalist and predemocratic, and they nostalgically longed for a return to the medieval guild system.

The socialists, therefore, seemed to many workers to offer the only hope, and there was a rapid proliferation of socialist Parties generally committed to the Marxian historical dialectic. One appeared in Germany by 1870, in Austria and Switzerland by 1888, in Sweden and Holland by 1889, and in Italy, Poland, and Finland by 1892.

By 1880, in fact, it was pretty clear that the working class in France was already lost to the Church. Various reasons may be cited for this: the generally reactionary character of Church leadership at the time; and the reluctance of Catholics to adopt new democratic procedures, their refusal to accept the idea of class conflict, and their paternalistic desire to protect the workers or to use them against socialism.

But in the 1880s a new spirit began to appear. A number of Catholics began to take a more realistic approach—one that recognized the right of the worker to control his own destiny; it was, no doubt, in part inspired by fear of losing the whole working class to the socialists. One of the chief men responsible for this change was Henry Edward Cardinal Manning (d. 1892), a convert from Anglicanism who successfully identified the English Roman Catholic Church with the cause of labor. As early as December 1872, Manning appeared at a meeting held to promote the cause of farm workers. It was a courageous act, since it was the first time in England that a Roman Catholic prelate had so openly taken the side of labor. He followed this up with a letter to the Prime Minister, Gladstone, urging the passage of laws prohibiting the labor of

children under a certain age and regulating housing. In 1874 he delivered a lecture "The Rights and Dignity of Labour" in which he forcefully defended the right of the worker to organize, called for laws to regulate the hours of work, and made a plea for people to look into the horrible abuses associated with child labor. He also agreed to serve on a royal commission on housing and advocated a radical approach to town planning that was far in advance of general thought.

In 1889 the London dock strike occurred-a big turning point in the history of labor in England-and though Manning was already eighty-two years of age, he took the lead in forming an arbitration committee. Though officially a mediator, his sympathies were with the dockers. He played a most important role in bringing about a settlement satisfactory to the workers, and they later showed their gratitude by organizing a huge cortege at his funeral.

He himself reflected after the strike, "I have been turning over the strike matters, and the more I think, the more I am on the side of Labour."⁴ To win a reputation as a friend of Labor at that time was quite courageous since, as he knew so well, the new social Catholicism was the most hateful of doctrines to those of the English faithful who looked upon the Church as the guardian of their interests, and religion as the best protection of their property.

Another of his most important acts as a friend of labor was the help he gave Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore in saving the Knights of Labor from condemnation by Rome. The Knights were the most powerful American labor union of the time, with two thirds of their members Catholic, including their president, Terence Powderly. A move to have them condemned by Rome was mounted by some conservative American and Canadian bishops. Like Cardinal Gibbons, Manning thought that such an act would be disastrous and might permanently alienate the working classes from the Church. So he exerted all the influence he could on the Curia, and in private correspondence and public utterance he made it apparent where he stood. When Gibbons went to Rome in 1886 to defend the Knights, Manning provided him with information about curial politics, whose opinion was worth gaining, who should be consulted, and so on.

Gibbons himself later on gave credit to Manning for Rome's final verdict favorable to the Knights.

Another important influence on the development of social Catholicism was the so-called Fribourg Union which consisted of social Catholic leaders who met annually for a week from 1884 to 1891. Under the presidency of Mgr. Gaspar Mermillod (d. 1892), who became a cardinal in 1890, the participants pooled their ideas and experiences showing definite signs of the new spirit among Catholics in regard to the social question. They agreed on the need for state intervention, and the need for workers to have separate Unions in opposition to the standard Catholic position which advocated joint unions of employer and worker; they also affirmed every person's right to work and to a living wage and called for insurance against sickness, accidents, and unemployment.

As Alec Vidler says, there emerged in the eighties what is no exaggeration to call a profound Catholic sociology, one that offered a powerful alternative to the other major ideologies of the day-economic liberalism or socialisms. It was this progressive Catholic social thought which Pope Leo XIII summarized and presented in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* which he issued in 1891.

Against the socialists the encyclical insists on private property as a natural right and asserted that the family is the primary social unit, prior to the state, and also rejects class warfare as an inevitable necessity. Against the liberal capitalists it upheld the need of some state intervention to safeguard the spiritual and material interests of the worker. It asserted the right of the worker to a living wage, refusing to allow the right to be subordinated to the necessities of so-called economic laws. It defended the right of the worker to organize to protect his interests. Finally it emphasized the importance of religion in fostering relations of justice and charity among men.

The encyclical *Rerum Novarum* has been rightly called the Magna Carta of social Catholicism, since it summarized the best Catholic thought on the social question, brought the main issues into focus, and laid down the main lines that Catholic social thought

would henceforth follow. It also challenged Catholics to get involved in the struggle for social justice and reform of the social order.

Of course, the encyclical went unheeded by many Catholics. It did not stop the spread of Marxian socialism among the workers, but it did meet with considerable response. And it had significant influence on two of the most powerful manifestations of social Catholicism: the Christian trade unions and the Christian democratic parties.

These Christian trade unions were at first merely clubs for workers-often run by priests in paternalistic fashion and designed to provide certain basic services for the downtrodden workers. But in the 1880s numerous Christian trade unions arose that were run by the workers themselves. This was true of the German Workers' Welfare Association (1879) and the Belgian Anti-Socialist League (1878), and above all the Belgian Democratic League (1891), which was the immediate ancestor of the Christian Workers' movement and which quickly numbered eighty thousand members. In Holland the first congress of the Catholic Workers' movement held in 1895 drew together forty-nine representatives of Catholic local unions. Similar movements took place in Italy and in France.

A special movement for young workers was begun by a Flemish priest, Father Cardijn (later a cardinal), who founded the Young Christian Workers or JOC in 1912 in order to organize the working-class youth in the neighborhood of his parish in Brussels. It involved the members not only in purely trade union business but also in a comprehensive range of activities, including a high degree of religious practice. In spite of the great demands it made on the time and energies of its members, it proved very successful, and by 1925 it reached a membership of some twenty thousand. Since then it has dominated the Belgian Christian Youth movement and also became the model for a similar organization of French working youth. The JOC has shown a remarkable capacity for understanding the problems, adopting the language, and reaching the mind of the working class, and its militants have provided a vital link between the Church and the workers' world in the countries where it has taken root. A recent rally in July of 1974 drew forty thousand

members to Versailles, where they reaffirmed their allegiance to Christ and to the struggle of the working class.

In spite of bitter opposition from the socialists, the leaders of the Christian trade unions refused to get bogged down in mere antisocialism. But while agreeing with the socialists that important changes were necessary in the capitalist order, they developed a positive program, which differed from that of the socialists on three main points: They emphasized the need for decentralization as opposed to socialist belief in state control: They favored what might be described as "collaboration through conflict-employer-worker collaboration was possible and indeed necessary, though it could become effective only if each party was ready and able to stand up for its own views and interests."⁶ And finally, they insisted on the cultivation of individual personality as the goal, rather than the socialist tendency to subordinate the individual to the mass.

In the beginning the Christian trade unions were dependent on Church personnel and Church inspiration; in many cases their first organizers were priests. And even when they came of age, it was difficult for them to sever their links with the Church. The issue of their relation to the Church was finally hammered out in a grand debate centered in Holland and Germany, which led to a general agreement that Christian trade unions might be denominational, interdenominational, or even neutral, as in the United States, but that no Christian should join a union whose policies did not reflect the Christian point of view. In general a dual pattern emerged: In Belgium, Switzerland, and Holland, the link between churches and trade unions remain much closer than in Germany, France, and Italy.

The formation of the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions in 1920, with 3.5 million members, showed that the movement had reached considerable maturity. They still lagged far behind the Socialists and Communists, however. But after the Second World War the Christian trade unions began to increase rapidly. Now in Holland and Flanders they are larger than the other two major unions the Communists and Social Democrats-while in France and Italy they outnumber the Social Democrats and have made considerable gains at the expense of the Communists. In

the German-speaking countries, where the Social Democrats are strongest, the Christian trade unions rank ahead of the Communists.

The Christian Democratic parties developed in close connection with the Christian trade union movement. When these parties suddenly emerged in 1945 as the most powerful political force in Western Europe, many people were startled. But it was no surprise to those familiar with the history we have been sketching here. The time had simply come for an idea that could be traced back to the rise of modern social Catholicism in the nineteenth century.

The Christian Democrat founding fathers were a number of bold and perspicacious Catholics in the 1890s who gave a new direction to Catholic social action by rejecting the traditional Catholic social medieval philosophy, which favored a hierarchical society, inequality of classes, and patronage of workers by the upper classes. Instead they wanted the workers to get more involved in the political and social decision-making process. They strove to organize the workers politically and obtain the vote for them so worker representatives could get elected to parliament to fight for legislation that would guarantee the right to bargain collectively and to obtain a living family wage and decent conditions of work.

The Belgian Catholics, here as in so many areas, led the way. Leaders of Christian Democratic persuasion were able to work within the established Catholic party—which dated back to 1869 and was strongly conservative—and gradually swing it over to its progressive views in spite of powerful opposition from the reactionaries. A whole series of progressive social reforms were carried out in Belgium, with the Catholic party playing a pivotal role: universal suffrage, housing policies, old age pensions, eight-hour day, and protection for a union's right to organize.

It meant a lot for the future of the Church in Belgium that the Christian Democrats were thus able to identify the Church with the promotion of social justice and to give Catholicism a new image as a progressive social force. After the disruption of the Second World War, the Christian Democrats—now called the Social Christian party—has consistently shared control over the country with the Socialists.

The German Catholic Center party (1870) during the 1870s and 1880s acted defensively in accepting monarchism. Fear of the anticlericalism present in a potentially democratic state led it to concentrate on defending the rights of Catholics.

Within the existing structure of the German Empire, it was not till the end of the century that the Christian trade unions and the Catholic workers' leagues could make their voice felt. By the 1920s the Center party could take considerable credit for the fact that in such matters as social insurance, factory regulations, and trade union protection, Germany was a world leader. After the Nazi interim, the Center was resurrected as the Christian Democratic Union under Konrad Adenauer's baton and with a heavy increment Protestant membership. Like the other Christian Democratic parties in Europe it has been a major force in public life, and under Adenauer, Chancellor of West Germany (1949-63), it played a large role in integrating the FRG into the Western European community of nations.

In some countries, notably Germany, Holland, and Belgium, the pioneer Christian Democrats at the turn of the century faced the problem of inserting a social and democratic element into a pre-existing Christian party. In others, notably Italy and France, the strategy demanded attracting support from outside for a movement that started as Christian Democratic.

The Italian Christian Democratic party was only formally launched in 1919, when Pope Benedict XV agreed to relax ecclesiastical control over the whole complex of Catholic social organizations—trade unions, co-operatives, and friendly societies that had taken shape during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Under prompting by a Sicilian priest, Don Luigi Sturzo, who had long called for a socially Progressive party of Christian inspiration, their leaders agreed to combine their forces into a new political party. Its first electoral test came in 1919, when it won 100 seats in parliament securing 1 million votes as against 1.5 million for the socialists. Like the German Catholic Center party, it hoped to be the pivot for all the democratic forces of society, but it was unable to

stop Mussolini and his Fascists from gaining power. Much of the responsibility for their failure was due to

Pius XI, who feared the Socialists more than the fascists who was too easily beguiled by Mussolini, who promised to resolve the conflicting papal and Italian claims to the city Rome. Pius pulled the rug out from under Sturzo and his Christian Democrats when he denounced any possibility of a Catholic understanding with the Socialists. Vatican maneuvers subsequently brought about Sturzo's exile.

The Church at first compromised itself with the fascist regime-but not fatally. Pius XI himself became increasingly hostile to Mussolini, and when the Fascist regime began to crumble, many of the leaders of the anti-German resistance turned to be Catholics. It was these men who reconstituted the Christian Democratic party in 1945-this time with full backing from the Church. Since then the Italian Christian democratic party has been the most powerful of Italy's political parties, regularly polling from 35 per cent to 40 percent of the vote. Under Christian Democratic rule, postwar Italy developed into a world industrial power, and living standard and educational levels rose accordingly. But the election of June 1976 show that a sizable number of Italians no longer look to the Christian Democrats for further progress and are turning to the Communists. But the Christian democrats still are in control of the government.

The last formed and least powerful of the Christian Democratic parties in Europe was the French Popular Democratic party, which first appeared on the scene in 1924. Its role during resistance against Germany in World War II strengthened its appeal, and in 1944 it was reborn as the popular Republican movement. In 1946 it polled 25 per cent of the popular vote-almost as much as the Communists-but when the youthful wing of the party showed itself really serious about reform in accordance with progressive social Catholic thought, the conservatives transferred their vote to De Gaulle.

By 1950 Christian Democratic parties held majorities or near majorities in the parliaments of Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria, and Italy and were substantially represented in those of France, Switzerland, and Norway. While still mainly a European movement it has also spread into underdeveloped Latin America. There it has manifested a leftward tendency, which has found its most able spokesman in Archbishop Helder Camara of Recife, Brazil. In Chile, the Falange Nacional, a party founded in 1938 on neo-Thomist principles, evolved by 1957 into a Christian democratic Party, and under former President Eduardo Frei Montalva favored a policy of land reform, education, and other development programs for the masses. But the recent military takeover has indicated the difficulty that faces any Christian Democratic party tied to the middle class if it tries to espouse any radical social change.

The popes have continued to issue encyclicals on social problems; these encyclicals reflect the evolving Catholic consensus and the trends and pressures of various interest groups within the Church. In the midst of the terrible worldwide Depression and to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pius XI issued his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931. Together with his other pronouncements on social issues, it indicated how social Catholicism since Leo XIII had developed into a coherent social philosophy more than able to hold its own against its chief rivals, materialistic Marxism and materialistic liberal capitalism.

Various points touched on by Leo XIII were defined more precisely by Pius. He still recognized private property as a natural right but hedged it about with further limitations, condemning its arbitrary use and all superfluous accumulation. He also developed the concept of a salary not governed simply by economic laws but what he called a "living wage" — one that enabled a man to support his family in some comfort and also to put away savings.

In the light of the laissez-faire mentality dominant in his times, Leo felt it necessary to call for more state intervention, but Pius in an age of growing totalitarianism proposed, as a safeguard against tyranny, the principle of subsidiarity — meaning that the state or

higher authority should leave to the lesser and subordinate organizations whatever they could competently handle. The state should see its main role as co. ordinating, planning, urging, and restraining the work of the lower bodies.

Pius took a comprehensive view of the whole social order, which he saw must be reconstructed in order to reflect the Gospel. The new social order he called for would be one pervaded by the spirit of justice and charity, one in which each person's rights would be recognized and safeguarded by institutions and structures built on "social justice"-a term he introduced into the Catholic vocabulary and made a key term of social Catholicism.

The Popes have continued to add to the social doctrine of the Church, and a vast corpus of papal statements on the social question now exist that have served to keep Catholic thought in touch with the accelerated developments of a revolutionary world. Pope John XXIII celebrated the seventieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* by issuing his *Mater et Magistra* (1961), which noted the important developments in Catholic social thought since the days of Leo. In *Pacem in Terris* (1963) he outlined the requisite conditions for peace among the nations. His successor, Paul VI, has also made notable pronouncements on social matters. His *Populorum Progressio* focused attention on the problems of the underdeveloped countries and reminded the wealthier countries of their responsibilities in alleviating their poverty.

These papal announcements have been noteworthy for their increasingly acerbic criticism of capitalism, their increasing tendency to limit the right of private property in the light of its social function, their concern with the causes of poverty, their awareness of the oppressive social structures that perpetuate exploitation, their insistence on the right of the worker to bargain collectively, and their recognition of the need for government intervention. They have consistently reminded Catholics of their duty to engage in social action, and more recently have stressed the need for Catholics to enter into dialogue with all men in order to participate in building a more just social order. Likewise they have urged Catholics to give their support to international agencies that are working for a just world

community, and they have called on all men to devote their best efforts to bring about total disarmament and to work for the immediate banning of nuclear weapons. They have also pointed out the necessity of putting limits on national sovereignty.

These documents show a gradual recognition of democracy as the form of government most in harmony with the innate dignity of man and the best guarantee of basic human rights. Their conceptual framework has been the basic moral norms and principles of the Catholic tradition: God as the foundation of the moral law and of all human authority, the obligation of authority to serve the common good, the family as the basic unity of society, the dignity of the human person, and the importance of truth, justice, and love as the basic norms of all human and social endeavor. The Second Vatican Council summed up the best fruits of social Catholicism in its statements, most notably in its constitution on the Church in the Modern World, where we find certain new emphases and advances in thought.