

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Preface

The most important thing to note about this pamphlet is that it is only an introduction to the subject which it treats. As an introduction, one of its functions is to attract attention to a subject not too widely studied or understood. To do this, it will deliberately emphasize only new and neglected aspects of the truth.

This deliberate emphasis on the unusual, however, should not blind readers to the fact that whatever was true in the past is just as true in the present. In insisting, as this pamphlet must insist, on the *social* nature and activity of man, there is no intention of denying in any way his *individual* nature and activity. It is only that this latter aspect of human nature is not the subject of this pamphlet.

Confirmed individualists will not like what they read in these pages. They will feel that their most cherished principles are being denied at every step of the way. The sole purpose of this preface is to point out to them, from the very beginning, that their truths of the individual order are *not* being denied—they are being *completed*.

CHAPTER I
The Work of Pope Pius XI
A Great Social Thinker

Pope Pius XI was one of the greatest social thinkers of modern times, or, for that matter, of any time. One of his greatest contributions to social thought was his doctrine of Social Justice as explained in his encyclicals *Quadragesimo Anno* and *Divini Redemptoris*.

What he did in these Encyclicals was to complete an essential chapter of moral philosophy which had lain undeveloped, and largely neglected, from the very dawn of philosophy. This “unfinished chapter” has become steadily more important in modern times because it forms the missing link between moral philosophy on one hand, and the vast modern development which is known as “Scientific Sociology” on the other.

The great struggle has raged over the radical instability of social phenomena. The fact-biased Sociologist saw this instability very clearly; and concluded very early in his science that he would have to discard all “immutable” principles to make room for it; while the principle-conscious moralist, faced with so devastating a conclusion, resisted to the point of ignoring, or actually fearing, the facts.

It is not surprising, therefore, that “Scientific Sociology” has been so intensely secularistic and even materialistic throughout its whole development—neither the sociologists nor the moralists have been able to see very clearly how their sciences could be reduced to unity, or even to compromise.

The problem was to put forward a theory of society which explained satisfactorily the countless fundamental changes of social organization which history reveals; and still be able to maintain, amidst this incessant and radical change, the unchanging rule of law.

The Radical Instability of Human Affairs

First let us see what Pope Pius XI has to say about the radical instability of human society. The best statement of his views is to be found in a discourse delivered on May 15, 1926, to a group which had been commemorating the thirty-fifth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII’s Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (“On the Condition of the Working Classes”). This discourse is in the direct line of Pope Pius XI’s own great Encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, which was written just five years later, on the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. As a matter of fact, the discourse is quoted (at Paragraph 49) in *Quadragesimo Anno*, and the reference given; so that it is obvious that it should be studied with the latter document.

The importance of the Discourse is further emphasized by the Holy Father’s statement at the beginning that it resulted from some sort of divine inspiration.

The Holy Father thinks himself in conscience bound to these dear sons who have come here in the expectation of some direction relative to their role as leaders of Catholic Action. That is why he will tell them in all confidence what the Lord inspired him to say at the moment when, kneeling before Him, he had repeated the beautiful prayer of St. Thomas: *Da mihi, Domine, sedium tuarum assistricem sapientiam*. . . .

The first reflection bears upon the instability of human affairs, and not only of the minor ones, but also of the great; not only of those which are contingent circumstances of social life, but also those which seem bound up with the very substance of things, and which we are not in the habit of conceiving in any other way than as unchangeable.

There is an instability from which no single thing can escape, for that, precisely, is the essence of created things: they have not in themselves the reason for their own being. Thus it happens that even for the greatest things, for those that are closest to the substance of certain institutions, instability is possible, and sometimes inevitable—and it is even, in fact, commonplace, especially if we do not stop at the consideration of each fact in particular, but extend our view to the great considerations of history and of the road traveled by the human race.

The fact is that precisely in those social elements which seem fundamental, and most exempt from change, such as property, capital, labor, a constant change . . . is not only possible, but is real, and an accomplished fact. It suffices to examine the course of history.

Of course, the fundamental principle: “Thou shalt not steal,” remains immutable, and in disregard of it there is only violation of the divine precept. But what divers concrete forms property has had, from that primitive form among rude and savage peoples, which may be observed in some places even in our own day, to the form of possessions in the Patriarchal Age, and so further to the various forms under Tyranny (We are using the word “Tyranny” in its classical sense); and then through the feudal and, later, monarchical forms, to the various types that are to be found in more recent times! How many and how different attitudes in what concerns not only the great collectivities, but even the family, and individuals!

Most of the last paragraph above is quoted in *Quadragesimo Anno*. It will be noticed that besides indicating profound changes in the concept and fact of property throughout the ages, this passage also indicates, as the Pope himself is careful to point out in the last sentence, equally fundamental changes in the forms and ideas of the State and of the family, as well as in the norms and limits of individual action. The quotation continues:

It is the same with labor. From the primitive work of the man of the stone age, to the great organization of production of our day, how many transitions, ascensions, complications, diversities! . . .

What an enormous difference! It is therefore necessary to take such changes into account, and to prepare oneself, by an enlightened foresight and with complete resignation, to this instability of things and of human institutions, which are not all perfect, but necessarily imperfect and susceptible of changes.

The most pragmatical of the modern “Scientific Sociologists” could not surpass this statement of the radical instability “even of those great institutions which seem bound up with the very substance of things, and which we are not in the habit of conceiving in any other way than as unchangeable.” The Pope could venture so boldly into this “no-man’s-land” between the moralists and the sociologists because he knew that he had already found the answer to the unsolved problem of both sides: how to maintain the reign of unchanging law if it is once admitted that the “very substance of things” is subject to change.

A Philosophical Detective Story

The principles which he had already clarified in his own mind, and intended to apply to the rapidly changing drama of modern history, were *Social Justice* and *Social Charity*. In this view, all society is simply a habitual organization (technically: an “institution”) of human actions; which is in constant and necessary *flux* precisely because it is an organization of *action*, but which at the same time is kept constantly—we could even say *unchangeably*—*organized for the same end*, human and Christian perfection, by the Laws of Social Justice and Social Charity.

Pope Pius XI seems to have invented the very term “Social Charity” himself; but he picked up the term “Social Justice” from a growing popular usage which began about 1850. Before 1850, “Legal Justice” or “General Justice” were the only terms used to designate what we now call “Social Justice.”

The history of “Legal Justice” had been a long and none too happy one; and when Pope Pius XI finally wrote the last chapter, he solved a philosophical “mystery story” whose solution had eluded the world’s best thinkers from Aristotle on down.

The Story: Aristotle

It was in the Fourth Century B.C. that the story began. Then Aristotle discussed “Legal Justice”—and probably invented the term—in the Fifth Book of his *Ethics*; but he left the idea fuzzy and anemic. For him it wasn’t a special virtue at all, but rather a name for all virtues insofar as the law required their

practice. It offered little help towards building a good society beyond the rather obvious information that law-abiding people made better citizens than gangsters.

Fifteen Centuries Later

There the matter stood until the greatest thinker of the Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas, took the idea up and made something of it. What he did was to redefine it as *a special virtue which has the Common Good for its direct object*. Of course, the common good of society is so all-embracing that every act of virtue done by the members of society will contribute something to it. In this “indirect” way, Aristotle was right. That was why Legal Justice, whose direct object is the Common Good, was also called “general justice”—for the sake of that Common Good it could also (i.e., “indirectly”) demand acts of every other virtue. Thus, in defense of the Common Good of a country, it could demand bravery (“fortitude”) from a soldier. In this example the soldier’s virtue is not only that of fortitude (facing death bravely), but also that of Social Justice (defense of the Common Good); and every other virtue whatever could also *become* an act of Social Justice in the same way, i.e., by being done for the Common Good.

This is a great improvement over Aristotle’s imperfect notion, but it still leaves a tremendous question unanswered: If this Social Justice is now really a *special virtue*, does it have any *special and direct acts of its own*? It is easy to see how acts of the other virtues could all give the Common Good a “lift” once this Common Good is already a “going concern”; but is there an act of this special virtue which directly “makes” the Common Good—starts it off and builds it up, or rebuilds it if it happens to be destroyed?

The Suspense Drags On

Much as he did for Social Justice, St. Thomas did not ask or answer this crucial question, and for over seven hundred years after him, few philosophers asked it and none gave the answer. Of those few who did ask it, some denied that the question was a good one, and the rest said, No! In fact, one of the most recent of these, actually commenting on Pope Pius XI’s teaching, was so blinded by his own training that he could not see what the Pope was driving at, and ended his discussion of Social Justice with the awful statement: “The Common Good is *not* an object which can be directly attained.” When it is remembered that the Common Good is the greatest of natural goods, that only under its sway can individual goods be attained or retained, that without it each individual’s share of personal perfection is either limited or destroyed, one can begin to realize what a mess society would be in if that statement were true! It may even be that the *status quo* (“Latin,” as someone said, “for the mess we are in!”) results, as much as anything, from our widespread belief that it *was* true.

The best that the social philosophers of the past could manage was to teach that in every action Social Justice required “a good intention” for the Common Good. But how uncertain this “good intention” is when not backed up by a complete theory of Social Justice, can be seen from the fact that the high priest of unrestrained individualism, Adam Smith, appealed to it constantly to justify his destructive

theories! Few books profess devotion to the Common Good more often or more insistently than his *Wealth of Nations*.

It was left for Pope Pius XI to put the question clearly and accurately—after twenty-three centuries!—and to answer it right.

CHAPTER II Social Justice and its Direct Act

“The Encyclical on Social Justice”

The long-missing specific and direct act of Social Justice is used as the title of the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*: “On the Reconstruction of Social Order.” This title occurs in the heading of the Letter; the words “Quadragesimo anno,” being simply the first two words of the Letter itself. This document is a truly masterly treatise on the whole virtue of Social Justice, though the applications of the theory are made mostly to the economic order, which is only one aspect, though a “most important” one, of social life.

The term “Social Justice” is used ten times in this encyclical, and there are many other passages where the same idea occurs, but without the technical name. Yet very few commentators seem to have realized that this is the subject, and the most important point, of the Papal teaching. They discuss the living wage, the family wage, property, labor, capitalism, competition, monopoly, class war, Communism—all the details that are used for explanation and illustration—but miss the great subject of the whole Encyclical!

It would be a very salutary practice to refer always to the Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* as “The Encyclical on Social Justice.” Thus attention would be drawn to the central idea, instead of to the supporting details and illustrations.

A Common Misunderstanding

Let us give an example of how the Encyclical’s great message can be misunderstood. In paragraph 71, the Holy Father says:

Every effort must therefore be made that fathers of families receive a wage large enough to meet common domestic needs adequately. But if this cannot always be done under existing circumstances, Social Justice demands that changes be introduced into the system as soon as possible, whereby such a wage will be assured to every adult workingman.

Now if we were to hand this quotation to a number of people, and ask each one of them what Social Justice *demands* in it, almost every one of them would answer, “A family wage.”

They would all be wrong! Look again at the syntax of the sentence: the direct object of the predicate “demands” is the clause “that changes be introduced into the system.” The Pope’s teaching on the

family wage is that it is due in commutative or strict justice to the individual worker;—what *Social Justice* demands is something specifically *social*: the *reorganization of the system*. For it is the whole system which is badly organized (“socially unjust”) when it withholds from the human beings whose lives are bound up in it, the power to “meet common domestic needs adequately.”

Very Clear Teaching

The Holy Father later summarized the teaching of *Quadragesimo Anno* in several paragraphs of *Divini Redemptoris* (“On Atheistic Communism”). In Paragraph 53 of this latter document he gives a very clear example for his teachings:

It happens all too frequently, under the salary system, that individual employers are helpless to insure justice, unless, with a view to its practice, they organize institutions whose object is to prevent competition incompatible with fair treatment of the workers. Where this is true, it is the duty of contractors and employers to support such necessary organizations as normal instruments enabling them to fulfill their obligations of justice.

Here the two levels of justice are clearly distinguished. On the level of commutative or individual justice the employer is *helpless*, and note that this happens “all too frequently.” Now evidently, if he is really helpless to do full justice, he does not sin when out of sheer necessity he falls short of justice. In individual justice the case is closed, for the employer can do nothing about it; and the injustice must be allowed to continue out of sheer inability to stop it.

Above this field of individual justice, however, there is the whole field of Social Justice, and in this higher field the case is *never* closed. The “helplessness” of individuals comes from the fact that the *whole industry* is badly organized (“socially unjust”). Social Justice demands that it be *organized rightly* for the Common Good of all who depend upon it for their welfare and perfection. Therefore employers have the duty—the rigid duty of Social Justice which they cannot disregard without sin—to work *together* (socially) to reorganize their industry. Once this reorganization (act of Social Justice) has been accomplished by group (social) action, then the employers will no longer be helpless in the field of individual justice, and will be under obligation to meet their strict duties in this latter field.

Something Solid

From the example given by the Holy Father, it will be seen immediately that Social Justice is not at all the vague and fuzzy “blanket word” that gets into so many popular speeches. It is an absolutely clear and precise scientific concept, a special virtue with definite and rigid obligations of its own.

But there is no use looking to anyone earlier than Pope Pius XI for a definition and description of it complete enough to include the specific act (organizing) by which Social Justice is directly practiced. There are suggestions and partial glimpses, of course, in every work that ever dealt with social problems; but if anyone before Pope Pius XI ever put all the pieces together in one coherent theory, he has succeeded in keeping his secret remarkably well!

Appendix A to Chapter II
Quotations from *Quadragesimo Anno*

For the benefit of those who want to analyze more deeply the teachings of the Holy Father in his own words, some pertinent 10 Introduction to Social Justice passages of *Quadragesimo Anno* are here transcribed and commented upon. Each passage will be prefixed by its paragraph number in the complete text to permit ready reference to the latter:

For the Common Good

56. [H]owever the earth may be apportioned among private owners, it does not cease to serve the common good of all. This same doctrine We Ourselves also taught just above in declaring that the division of goods which results from private ownership was established by nature itself in order that created things may serve the needs of mankind in a fixed and stable order. Lest one wander from the right path of truth, this is something which must be continually kept in mind.

57. But not every distribution among human beings of property and wealth is of a character to attain either completely or with a satisfactory degree of perfection, the ends which God intended. Therefore the riches which socio-economic development constantly increase ought to be so distributed among individual persons and classes that the common advantage of all, which Leo XIII had praised, will be safeguarded; in other words, that the Common Good of all society will be kept inviolate. By this law of Social Justice, one man is forbidden to exclude the other from sharing in the benefits.

58. To each therefore must be given his own share of good, and the distribution of created goods, which, as every discerning person knows, is laboring today under the greatest evils, due to the few exceedingly rich and the unnumbered propertyless, must be effectively called back to, and brought into conformity with, the norm of the Common Good, i.e., Social Justice.

Commentary

Notice in the above paragraphs that Social Justice is expressly directed towards the Common Good. This identifies it completely with the traditional "Legal Justice," and with no other virtue whatsoever. In the technical language of the philosophers, "actions are specified by their ends," and both the traditional

Legal Justice and the modern Social Justice have identically the same end: the Common Good. The fact that so much of the above paragraphs is taken up with distributive justice, does not alter this conclusion in the least. It is Social Justice which directs the distribution in question towards the Common Good; exactly as we have seen, in a former example, that it can direct fortitude *towards the Common Good*. That is why Social Justice is also called “General Justice”: it can demand an act of any other virtue whatsoever for the Common Good.

A Question of Structure

70. Conclusions of the greatest importance follow from this two-fold (individual and social) character which nature has impressed upon human work, and it is in accordance with these that wages ought to be regulated and established.

71. In the first place, the worker must be paid a wage sufficient to support him and his family. That the rest of the family should also contribute to the common support, according to the capacity of each, is certainly right, as can be observed especially in the families of farmers, and also in the families of many craftsmen and small shopkeepers. But to abuse the years of childhood and the limited strength of women is grossly wrong. Mothers, concentrating on household duties, should work primarily in the home or in its immediate vicinity. It is an intolerable abuse, and to be abolished at all costs, for mothers, on account of the father’s low wage, to be forced to engage in gainful occupations outside the home, to the neglect of their proper cares and duties, especially the training of children. Every effort must therefore be made that fathers of families receive a wage large enough to meet common domestic needs adequately, but if this cannot always be done under existing circumstances, Social Justice demands that changes be introduced into the system as soon as possible, whereby such a wage will be assured to every adult workingman. And it will not be out of place here to render merited praise to all who, with a wise and beneficent purpose, have tried and tested various ways of adjusting the pay for work to family burdens.

Commentary

The amount of futile discussion which has raged around this passage on whether the family wage is due by social or commutative justice, or even by distributive justice, is a brilliant vindication of St. Thomas Aquinas’ name for the discursiveness of human reason: he called it *defectus intellectus*, which could be freely translated as “lack of vision” or “failure to see it whole.”

From the beginning of the above passage it is important to realize that the thing under discussion is what we call “the wage structure”—not any given wage for this man or for that. All the considerations on the individual aspects of family life, on the functions, so to say, of the various members, are introduced to show on what considerations one must establish the norm for that structure. Then if the “existing circumstances” (i.e., the whole industrial set-up, the “going concern,” the present structure) fall short of that norm, Social Justice “demands that changes be introduced”—not, be it noted, in the

individual pay envelope of each individual head of a family (for it is precisely *that* which “cannot be done under the existing circumstances”), but in the “going concern” itself, in the *organization* of the whole enterprise: the procurement, financing, management, production, distribution, etc., so as to *accommodate a wage structure adequate to the norm* of Social Justice. Once this new structure is established, it will be possible to meet the demands of individual justice for all concerned.

In the little digression tacked on to the end of this paragraph (“It will not be out of place,” etc.), the question of structure is still further emphasized: the Pope would not “render merited praise” to those who had “tried and tested various ways” unless he were dealing with a complex problem of *reorganization* requiring great prudence and perseverance as well as “beneficent purpose.”

Eternal Vigilance

74. Lastly, the amount of pay must be adjusted to the public economic good. . . . Another point . . . especially vital in our times, must not be overlooked: namely, that the opportunity to work be provided for those who are able and willing to work. This opportunity depends largely upon the wage and salary rate, which can help as long as it is kept within proper limits; but which can be, on the other hand, an obstacle if it exceeds those limits. For everyone knows that an excessive lowering of wages, or their increase beyond due measure, causes unemployment. This evil, indeed, especially as we see it prolonged and injuring so many during the years of Our Pontificate, has plunged workers into misery and temptation, ruined the prosperity of nations, and put in jeopardy the public order, peace, and tranquility of the whole world. Hence it is contrary to Social Justice when, for the sake of personal gain, and without regard for the Common Good, wages and salaries are excessively lowered or raised; and this same Social Justice demands that wages and salaries be so managed, through agreement of purposes and wills, so far as can be done, so as to offer to the greatest possible number the opportunity of getting work and obtaining suitable means of livelihood.

Commentary

Note in the above passage that the term Social Justice is used twice, and that there is an interesting difference between the two cases. The first is what we might call an “open and shut case”—one completely disposed of once the solution is offered: “It is contrary to Social Justice when, for the sake of personal gain and without regard for the Common Good, wages are excessively lowered or raised.” This is evidently a case of what we call bad will or malice, and it is simply and always wrong.

But how about the men of good will—or, to put it more specifically, how about that famous “good intention for the Common Good” which was about all the philosophers of the past could demand in order that an act be termed legal or social justice?

That “good intention” is no more than a starting point for *this* Social Justice: What Social Justice demands—far beyond a mere act of the will—is “*management, through agreement of purposes and wills, insofar as can be done, to offer the greatest possible number . . . a suitable means of livelihood.*”

Evidently, we are here face to face with something that can never be a closed case in this world. If *that* is the nature of the demands of Social Justice in this one small field, then it doesn’t take much thinking to realize that a serious and constant preoccupation with social organization, in all its forms, and at all its levels, is the *duty*, according to his capacity, of every man living in society. This is a big order, especially when it is further realized that such a duty (allowing, of course, for the inescapable and all too evident limitations of discursive reason) binds him in *every exterior action of his life*. It will be interesting to see how it is done!

What Makes the Good Society—Conflict or Social Justice?

88. Attention must also be given to another matter. . . . Just as the unity of human society cannot be founded upon an opposition of classes, so also the right ordering of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces . . . a truth which the outcome of the practical application of the tenets of this evil individualistic spirit has more than sufficiently demonstrated. Therefore it is most necessary that economic life be again subjected to and governed by a true and effective directing principle. This function is one that the economic dictatorship which has recently displaced free competition can still less perform, since it is a headstrong power and a violent energy that, to benefit people, needs to be strongly curbed and wisely ruled. But it cannot curb and rule itself. Loftier and nobler principles—Social Justice and Social Charity—must therefore be sought whereby this dictatorship may be governed firmly and fully. Hence the institutions of peoples, and particularly those of all social life, ought to be penetrated with this justice; and it is most necessary that it be truly effective, that is, establish a juridical and social order which will, as it were, give form and shape to all economic life. Social Charity, moreover, ought to be as the soul of this order, an order which public authority ought to be ever ready effectively to protect and defend.

Commentary

This passage, which has not been quoted here in its entirety, deserves careful study. First of all, the Holy Father refuses three alternatives to Social Justice as guides or norms of society. These alternative, but vicious, “norms” of society are the following: (1) class warfare, (2) free competition, and (3) economic dictatorship. The first, in parts of the Encyclical not quoted here, is utterly condemned; the second and third are admitted to have utility, but what is absolutely denied to them is that they can ever be a directive principle, either of themselves or of economic life in general. Both of these latter, especially the third one because of its extraordinary power, must be ruled by Social Justice and Social Charity. The first is entirely vicious because it is a direct negation of Social Justice and Social Charity.

All this can be summed up in a sentence: *Not conflict* in any form, but *only Social Justice* (organization for the Common Good) is the ultimate principle of society.

Here we can go a step further in considering the shortcomings of any theory of Social Justice which makes it a mere “intention for the Common Good.” The Holy Father is categorical in his statement that Social Justice must enter into the *practical* order before it can be said to exist. He says that *all* institutions, both those “of peoples” (governmental) and those “of all social life” (semi-public and private) must be penetrated with this justice. He insists further that “it is necessary that it be truly effective.” Then, to explain this effectiveness, he leads us back once more to the master-idea of *organized and institution-building* action, without which is a mere bandying about of words: “this Justice must *establish a juridical and social order* which will, as it were, *give form and shape* to all economic life.”

This remarkable expression, “to give form and shape to life,” recurs several times in Pope Pius XI’s work, and will lead us later on in this pamphlet to an explanation of the institutions of life as “social habits.”

Here also we might note the great breadth of Pope Pius XI’s vision. The older “Legal Justice,” both because of its imperfect beginnings in Aristotle and because of the suggestiveness of its name, always tended to be reduced to its narrowest possible meaning, for which we might invent the term “courtroom justice.” There is evidence to support the belief that Pope Pius XI recognized this tendency, and its almost complete triumph in modern times, and deliberately decided to throw off this weight of tradition from his own teachings. At the beginning of his Pontificate, in the Encyclical *Studiorum Ducem*, occurs the phrase “in re sociali et in jure recta principia ponendo de justitia legali aut de sociali”:—“both in social life and in jurisprudence laying down correct principles for Legal Justice as well as for Social Justice.”¹ After this he abandoned “Legal Justice” entirely to the jurists and never used it in his social teachings. The older theory did not recognize the confusion in the term because, for it, Legal Justice *was* somehow bound up with law; but in the completed theory of Pius XI, Social Justice, far from playing any subordinate role to Law, actually *makes* the law itself: “It is most necessary that it *establish a juridical . . . order.*” The Law in all its majesty is simply one of the institutions which Social Justice creates for the Common Good!

Finally, this passage brings forcibly to our attention the concept of Social Charity. This concept of *Social Charity* is very likely, as we have already seen, original with Pius XI. The traditional virtue of “*pietas erga patriam*” certainly touches some of the same values; but even more certainly it is incomplete. The newer concept of Social Charity is not developed in the Encyclical to the extent that Social Justice is developed; and thus a great field is opened up to the research of philosophers and moralists to delineate clearly the meaning of this Social Charity and its scope.

¹ For the benefit of Latin scholars who may be troubled by the translation of “aut” by “as well as,” the above phrase is immediately continued by: “*intemque de commutative aut de distributiva,*” where “aut” cannot possibly have the same meaning.

How to Fail Against Social Justice

101. With all his energy, Leo XIII sought to adjust this (capitalistic) economic system according to the norms of right order; hence it is evident that this system is not to be condemned in itself. And assuredly it is not of its own nature vicious. But it does violate right order when capital hires workers, that is the non-owning class, with a view to and under such terms that it directs business and even the whole economic system according to its own will and advantage, scorning the human dignity of the workers, the social character of economic activity, and Social Justice itself, and the Common Good.

Commentary

In this description of the social injustice of which Capitalism has made itself guilty, we may notice once more that the question at issue is one of *deliberate organization*: “with a view to and under such terms as to” capture the very system of economic life itself for private and selfish ends. The Pope then analyzes the evil of such an act: In the first place, it “scorns human dignity.” This is largely a failure against Charity as we will see in Chapter III. In the second place, it “scorns the social character of economic activity.” This is a failure against both Social Charity and Social Justice, in that it disregards the fact that the organization of the industry “takes so tight a grip on the human life” of the workers that it largely determines whether and to what degree “their share of human happiness will be even accessible to them.” Thirdly, it “scorns Social Justice itself”; that is, it formally denies that any obligation lies upon the industry *to be so organized* that each worker’s and the whole community’s “share of human happiness is accessible.” Finally, it “scorns the Common Good.” It plunges the workers into misery and temptations, ruins the prosperity of the community, and puts in jeopardy the public peace and welfare.

Two Levels and Many Divisions

110. So as to avoid the reefs of individualism and collectivism, the two-fold (i.e., individual and social) character both of Capital and ownership, and of labor or work, must be given due and rightful weight. Relations of one to the other must be made to conform to the laws of strictest justice—commutative justice as it is called—with proper support, however, of Christian Charity. Then free competition, kept within definite and due limits, and still more, economic dictatorship, must be effectively brought under public authority in those matters which pertain to the latter’s function (i.e., the Common Good). These same public institutions, moreover, ought to make all human society conform to the needs of the Common Good, that is, to the norm of Social Justice. If this is done, that most important division of social life, namely, economic activity, cannot fail likewise to return to right and sound order.

Commentary

Here we meet once more the two levels of justice: first, strictest (“narrowest”) or commutative justice, which directly regulates the relationships of capital and labor to each other; and then, above them, Social Justice, which by a proper organization of the whole industry, of the whole going concern, makes

the payment of just wages possible in it. Some writers have tried to explain this in a popular way by saying that when the business is in good shape and able to pay just wages, it owes such wages in commutative justice; but even if it is badly organized and in distress it still owes just wages, this time in Social Justice. This is inaccurate and highly misleading. *Even* when in distress, it still owes just *wages in commutative justice*—only it can't pay them! Social Justice does not give some sort of additional claim to “a just wage anyhow, regardless of circumstances”—what it gives is a direct and enforceable claim to have the business so organized that a just wage *is* possible; and even after Social Justice has brought about this happy state, it is still commutative justice which directly demands that the just wage be paid.

Note in the last part of this quotation how the vast concept of Social Justice goes far beyond the economic applications of the Encyclical:—to “all human society” and “all social life,” of which economic activity is only “a most important division.”

Notice finally, that the power to make all human society conform to the norms of Social Justice is vested in *institutions*, in *organizations of men*, not in men as isolated individuals. Social Justice is something *social*.

Appendix B to Chapter II: Quotations from *Divini Redemptoris*

Since, as we have seen, “not conflict in any form, but only Social Justice can be the ultimate principle of society,” it is easy to understand why the Holy Father returned to his teachings on Social Justice in the Encyclical “On Atheistic Communism” (*Divini Redemptoris*). But he had another good reason for repeating and insisting on his former teachings: Six years had passed since he wrote *Quadragesimo Anno*, and most people hadn’t caught on! Though the passage in this second document is rather long, it deserves to be quoted in full.

Let’s Get This Straight!

51. In reality, besides commutative justice (which is strictly enjoined in the preceding two paragraphs, 49 and 50, of the Encyclical), there is also Social Justice with its own set obligations, from which neither employers nor workingmen can escape. Now it belongs to Social Justice to demand from each individual all that is necessary for the Common Good.

Commentary

This is evidently an attempt by the Holy Father to silence some of his fuzziest “Commentators,” who had been trying to “explain” Social Justice as somehow “straddling” various traditional virtues, especially distributive and commutative justice. Not only does he expressly rule out commutative justice, but also, by implication, *any* kind of combination or straddling of other virtues. What he says is that Social Justice has “*its own* set obligations.”

The Common Good and Individuals

51. But just as in the living organism it is impossible to provide for the good of the whole unless each individual member is given what it needs for the exercise of its proper functions, so it is impossible to care for the social organism and the good of society as a unit unless each single part and each individual member—that is to say, each individual man in the dignity of his human personality—is supplied with all that is necessary for the exercise of his social functions.

Commentary

Here the Holy Father shows how distributive justice does get into the picture: it is not Social Justice, but Social Justice *commands* that it (like all other virtues) be observed insofar as the Common Good needs it. He could have used commutative justice or any other virtue in this paragraph, because Social Justice can command them all in the same way. That is why moral philosophers call all these other acts of virtue “commanded acts” of Social Justice.

The Proof of the Pudding . . .

51. If Social Justice is satisfied, the result will be an intense activity in economic life as a whole, pursued in tranquillity and order. This activity will be proof of the health of the social body, just as the health of the human body is recognized in the undisturbed regularity and perfect efficiency of the whole organism.

Commentary

Here once more the Holy Father is careful to point out that a mere good intention for the Common Good is not enough. He makes it clear that the only criterion he will permit as to whether Social Justice is being observed is an *actually* good state of society. This is a large order! What it amounts to, in the world as we know it, is simply a condemnation (if one insists on looking at it that way) to ceaseless effort. Whether this “proof” that “Social Justice is satisfied” ever was in fact realized, or will be in fact realized, is a problem for history or prophecy; the only problem for social philosophy is that as long as it is not in fact realized, there can be no excuse and no mercy for lack of effort!

Let’s Get Down to Cases

52. But Social Justice cannot be said to have been satisfied as long as workingmen are denied a salary that will enable them to secure proper sustenance for themselves and for their families; as long as they are denied the opportunity of acquiring a modest fortune and forestalling the plague of universal pauperism; as long as they cannot make suitable provision for public or private insurance for old age, for periods of illness, and unemployment.

Commentary

This paragraph adds nothing new. It simply applies the preceding principles to practical details to make sure their full import will be clear.

Thus far, in this passage from *Divini Redemptoris* the Holy Father has limited himself to what was clear in the traditional teaching on “Legal Justice”: that Social Justice has the Common Good as its object, and that it can “command” the observance of other virtues for that Common Good. Then he links this teaching with that of *Quadragesimo Anno* by quoting from that document:

To Sum Up

52. In a word, to repeat what has been said in our Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*: “Then only will the economic and social order be soundly established and attain its end, when it offers, to all and to each, all those goods which the wealth and resources of nature, technical science, and the social organization of economic life can furnish. And these goods ought indeed to be enough both to meet the demands of necessity and decent comforts, and to advance people to that

fuller and happier condition of life which, when it is wisely cared for, is not only no hindrance to virtue, but helps it greatly.”

Commentary

In the middle of this passage, it is interesting to note what might be called *the elements of economic life*:

First, the wealth and resources of nature, secondly, technical science, and thirdly, the social organization of economic life. The first of these elements is fixed and stable, God’s gift about which man can do nothing whatsoever since it is not in his power to annihilate or to create. The second, which controls the first, is partly fixed, for there is such a thing as “natural capacity” for science, which is not uniform and not readily changed. Yet man enjoys a considerable control over it by that “social organization” known as education. The third element, social organization itself, is entirely under man’s control. Hence it appears that the only fully controllable factor is this third, both in itself and in its influence on the two others. When this is clearly seen, it is easy to understand why the act of Social Justice is the act of organizing.

It is this element of organization that the Pontiff then goes on to deal with in the second part of the text, which will follow. It is in this part of the quotation that Pius XI goes beyond his predecessors to complete the theory of Social Justice.

Only Individualism Is Helpless: Social Justice Has An Answer

53. It happens all too frequently, however, under the salary system, that individual employers are helpless to insure justice unless, with a view to its practice, they organize institutions the object of which is to prevent competition incompatible with fair treatment of the workers. Where this is true, it is the duty of contractors and employers to support and promote such necessary organizations as normal instruments enabling them to fulfill their obligations of justice. But the laborers too must be mindful of their duty to love and deal fairly with their employers, and persuade themselves that there is no better way of safeguarding their own interests.

Commentary

The two levels of justice as they are here outlined have already been commented upon in this pamphlet. Here it will be sufficient to warn the reader that the unjust competition mentioned in the paragraph is only an example of what difficulties a business might face. The same principles would apply if the difficulty came from outside pressure, as in a “colonial economy,” or from lack of intelligence or energy within the industry. This is clear in Paragraphs 72 and 73 of *Quadragesimo Anno*; and the general law covering all possible cases is stated in Paragraph 69 of that Encyclical, as follows:

Man's productive effort cannot yield its fruits unless a truly social and organic body exists, unless a social and juridical order watches over the exercise of work, unless the various occupations, being interdependent, co-operate with and mutually complete one another. And, what is still more important, unless mind, material things, and work combine and form as it were a single whole. Therefore, where the social and individual nature of work is neglected, it will be impossible to evaluate work justly and pay it according to justice.

This paragraph deserves study for its implications as to how helpless an individual really is to secure his own perfection in an unjustly organized society.

Institutions Are the Key Idea

54. If, therefore, we consider the whole structure of economic life, as we have already pointed out in our Encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, the reign of mutual collaboration between justice and charity in social economic relations can only be achieved by a body of professional and inter-professional organizations, built on solid Christian foundations, working together to effect, under forms adopted to different places and circumstances, what has been called the corporation.

Commentary

Thus, as this whole quotation which we have been examining clearly shows, *organizations* and *institutions* furnish the key for the understanding of Social Justice; and there will be no effective insight whatever into Social Justice without this key. The last paragraph shows how *profoundly* the idea of organization enters into this conception of justice, as does also paragraph 69 of *Quadragesimo Anno* which was quoted in the comments immediately preceding it. Both of these paragraphs make it absolutely clear that without right organization, without good social groups, without just institutions, there is no such thing as Social Justice, and in such a state the perfection of human life becomes impossible.

CHAPTER III
The Dignity of the Human Personality:
Basis of a Theory of Justice

In the Individual Order

For Pope Pius XI, the theory of justice based squarely upon the dignity of the human personality. His position is that charity regulates our actions towards the human personality itself, that *Image of God* which is the object of love because it mirrors forth the Divine Perfections, and in a supernatural order shares those perfections. The human personality, however, because it is a created personality, needs certain “props” for the *realization* of its dignity. These “props” or supports of human dignity, which include such things as property, relatives and friends, freedom and responsibility, are all the object of justice. To attack a human person in his personality *itself*, as by hatred, is a failure against charity; but to attack him by undermining the *supports* of his human dignity, as by robbery, is a failure against justice.

And In the Social Order

The same thing is true in the field of social morality. The human community, as such, shows forth the perfections of God in ways that are not open to individuals. This fact is very clearly stated in paragraph 30 of the Encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*:

In a further sense it is society which affords the opportunities for the development of all the individual and social gifts bestowed on human nature. These natural gifts have a value surpassing the immediate interests of the moment, for in society they reflect a Divine Perfection, which would not be true were man to live alone.

Society *itself*, therefore, as thus revealing further the perfection of God in His creatures, is worthy of love: of a love directed not only towards the individuals who compose the society, but also towards their union with each other. This love is social charity.

Moreover, as society thus makes available to man the further perfection of his potentialities of mirroring the divine perfection, *it also is a support* for these perfections, and hence is an object of the virtue of justice. This justice, Social Justice, which is directed towards the Common Good itself, requires that the society be so organized as to be in fact a vehicle for human perfection.

An Improvement Over the Past

It seems evident that this view of justice as the virtue which directly regards the supports of human dignity whether in the individual or in the social order, is a more profound view than the traditional one which was built largely around the technical conceptions of “equality, otherness, and debt.” It is true that it was always clear in justice that rights and duties pertained only to persons; but the immediate link of justice to the human personality was not clear.

Some strange things happened as the result of viewing justice in the more superficial way developed in pagan times. Since in that view justice was determined by the three notions of “equality, otherness, and debt,” it became quite common to speak of individual or commutative justice as the “most perfect form of justice” since it most perfectly conforms to the elements of the definition.

Yet if one examines the three great kinds of possession which support human dignity—possession of things or property, possession of persons or love, and possession of self in the freedom to plan one’s own destiny and to work it out according to one’s own responsibility—then it becomes evident that the possession of things, the object of commutative justice, is the lowest of these supports. Nowadays we would call commutative justice not the “most perfect” form of justice but the “strictest” (i.e., narrowest) form of justice; and this is the terminology which Pius XI uses. The highest form of justice is Social Justice because it directly regards that highest natural good, the Common Good, without which other goods of human perfection are unobtainable.

The Result of Past Thinking

It cannot be denied that at the present time the idea is widespread, that obligations of individual or commutative justice *must* always be met, but that obligations of Social Justice are not so rigid. This is totally false. The truth is that the obligations of Social Justice are *just as rigid* and *much more weighty* than the obligations of individual justice. It is true indeed that these obligations of Social Justice are harder to understand, harder to see; and that therefore the incidence of invincible ignorance, which excuses from action, may be expected to be greater. But whenever the obligations of Social Justice are understood and recognized, the duty of meeting those obligations is both rigid and very serious.

Work to Be Done

It is not at all difficult to see that this will require a profound readjustment of our appreciation of the nature and extent of our duties and obligations.

Much work of investigation and research remains to be done before these obligations of Social Justice can be made as clear to the common man as the obligations of individual justice have been made in the

course of centuries of moral and social thought; but one thing is already abundantly clear: in the field of Social Justice we are dealing with *serious matter*—with some of the greatest obligations of our lives.

CHAPTER IV
The Object of Social Justice,
The Common Good

Putting Two and Two Together . . .

To deepen our understanding of Social Justice we must get a clearer concept of its object: the “Common Good” or “general welfare” as it is called. Let us start with two great facts: (1) An isolated individualist cannot practice Social Justice at all, he must associate himself with *groups* of various kinds and work along with them before he can practice it; and (2) *Every* human action whatever has some bearing on the Common Good, and hence must conform to Social Justice or be sinful.

. . . We Get . . . Surprised

If these two points are put together, a rather startling conclusion emerges: since every action must conform to Social Justice or be sinful, and Social Justice can be practiced only by persons associated in groups, the obvious conclusion is that every action must be done in groups to be virtuous!

Two Kinds of Groups

At first sight, this looks weird indeed; until it is remembered that man’s very *nature* is social, and then it is just what one would expect. But it is not very clear how it is done. It becomes clearer when we see that there are two kinds of groups: informal or “natural” ones like farm life, city life, mining, slums, frontier life; and the formal or “planned” ones like a stock company, a board of directors, a city government, a labor union, a medical association, a university, a taxpayers association, a baseball club, a monarchy.

In the language of Catholic Action—another invention of Pope Pius XI—these two kinds of groups are called respectively “Milieux” and “Institutions.” “Milieu” is a French word meaning “medium” as in the sentence “water is the *natural medium* of fish, and air is the *natural medium* of birds.”

Informal or Natural Groups: “The Milieu”

Now if you will look at the examples given above of a “natural medium” of human life—farm life, city life, slums, frontier life—you will notice that they actually produce *different types of people*. The “hayseed,” the “city-slicker,” the miner, the slum dweller, the frontiersman, are different *types* of human beings that anyone can recognize at a glance, whether they occur in books or in real life. And then there is the executive, the “jitterbug” (formerly the drug-store cowboy), the clergyman, the hobo,

the laborer, and so on through the whole catalogue. These great differences in *types of men* all bear witness to the fact that every concrete natural medium of life exercises upon its members a continuous and powerful influence: an influence more or less confused, but very real.

Because of this continuous and powerful influence, that natural medium of life can largely determine the human perfection *attainable* by its members. Thus Pope Pius XI could say of our modern industrial systems: "Bodily labor, which Providence decreed is to be performed for the perfection of man's body and soul, is being everywhere changed into an instrument of perversion; for dead matter comes forth from the factory ennobled, while men are there corrupted and degraded!"

This "grip" which the natural medium of life has on human perfection is the source of the obligation to control it; and since it is made up precisely of all the actions of the people in it, every one of these actions is under that obligation. It might be pointed out that the whole theory of specialization, inquiry method, and cell technique in Catholic Action is directed towards control of each one's own natural medium of life; and the people who engage in this work or in work similar to it are the ones who are discharging their duty of Social Justice in their own sphere of life. All others, either deliberately or unknowingly, are failing.

Formal or Planned Groups: The Institution

But there is more to social life than these informal "natural media." There are also the formal "institutions." We have just seen one of these—Catholic Action—in its relation to the natural medium of life; and that relation is one of direct *control*. The natural medium of life is in itself too informal, too complex, too vast, too fluid and changing, too much subject to the will and shortcomings of thoughtless people, ever to be controlled directly by individual persons in it, for these individuals are helpless when, standing alone, they face its vast collective weight and pressure.

Pope Pius XI pointed this out clearly insofar as the natural medium of the industrial employers is concerned; and the same principle is of universal application. We have already seen on several occasions the text in which he indicates this truth: "It happens all too frequently, under the salary system that individual employers are helpless to insure justice, unless, with a view to its practice they organize institutions, etc."

As was already said, the application of this principle is universal, and it applies to every level of social life: to the family, the neighborhood, the school, the professions, the parish, the state, the city, interstate commerce, the nation, international relations, the United Nations, the World Court, the Church, the whole of human society. Every one of these things is an institution controlling some aspect of human life and made up of a whole network of subordinate institutions, each one controlling smaller aspects of human life.

Duty and Disorder

The Holy Father points out a three-fold duty to these institutions: to organize, to promote, and to support. These are specific acts of Social Justice; and anyone who would refuse to perform them at his level of the institutional hierarchy would thereby fail against Social Justice; for institutions are, as the Pope so clearly points out, “*necessary instruments, enabling men to fulfill their obligations.*” Without them the individual is “helpless to insure justice” and his natural medium of life, his level of society, is in disorder, is socially unjust. When this disorder reaches up into higher and higher levels of society, it becomes a world disorder, a true crisis of civilization, such as we are experiencing today.

The Nature of the Common Good

Every higher institution depends on all those below it for its effectiveness, and every lower institution depends on those above it for its own proper place in the Common Good. It is precisely this whole vast network of institutions which *is* the Common Good, on which every one of us depends for the realization of our personal perfection, of our personal good.

It is wrong to conceive of the Common Good as a sort of general bank account into which one “deposits” when, for instance he pays his taxes to the state; and “withdraws” when he is appointed public coordinator of something or other at a hundred and fifty dollars a week, or when the state builds a road past his farm and thus raises its value. It is surprising how many people think that distributive justice is the virtue that assesses taxes and Social Justice is the virtue that pays them. Both of these actions are distributive, that is, individual, justice; and become Social Justice only in a secondary way as they promote the Common Good.

Nor must we think of the Common Good as something which we can “share with another” like a candy bar or an automobile ride. Rather it is something which each of us possesses in its entirety, like light, or life itself. When the Common Good is badly organized, when society is socially unjust, then it is each individual’s *own* share of personal perfection which is limited, or which is withheld from him entirely.

Everyone Can Do It

When it is realized that the Common Good consists of that whole vast complex of institutions, from the simplest “natural medium” of a child’s life, to the United Nations itself, then a very comforting fact emerges: Each of these institutions from the lowest and most fleeting “natural medium” to the highest and most enduring organization of nations *is* the Common Good *at that particular level*. Therefore *everyone*, from the smallest and weakest child to the most powerful ruler in the world, can have *direct care of the Common Good* at his level. This is a far cry indeed from those social philosophers who before Pius XI could say with complete sincerity and conviction, “the Common Good is *not* something which can be *directly* attained.”

CHAPTER V
The Organs of the Common Good:
Social Habits or Institutions

In our attempt to understand the Common Good we have dealt with what we called “social habits,” which were of two kinds: first, “natural media of life”; and, secondly, “formal institutions.” We must now examine these ideas a little more closely if we are to get a real grasp of our subject.

Surprised Again

Let us start with a simple affirmation: all social acts whatever are highly organized. To some this may come as a shock, but let us take the simplest sort of act in the most material aspect of life; the act of buying and selling.

Some people might think that this requires no prolonged and arduous training—but it does. What a difference in procedure from such an act in a “bargaining tradition,” to the same act in a “fixed price tradition”! So great is this difference that it may take years for a man to make the transition from one to the other, even under the grinding force of daily economic losses. Perhaps the easiest way to bring home this truth quickly, is to transcribe a few paragraphs from a report of a missionary in China: “In business, one Chinese is supposed to be able to get the best of ten Westerners. Missionaries in China have, naturally, a great deal of business to do with the people, and their presence in a neighborhood is welcomed as much as a fox might welcome the advent of a chicken fancier. After a few years the stupid foreigner learns to take care of himself, and often achieves the honor of paying less than two or three times the price of an article.

“The first thing any new missionary must do in a new area is to secure a piece of land. He looks about for a suitable location which the owner is willing to part with. I don’t remember the procedure in America. Quite possibly the buyer might even approach the owner and ask him the price. Such a step in China would be ridiculous and disastrous. One fine morning the missionary sends one of his friends down to look over ‘that barren waste just north of the woods.’ He occasionally makes slighting remarks about the property’s being unfit for his purpose. Finally he might confide (under pledge of great secrecy) to his number-one man, that he would take the property if the owner would sell it for five dollars an acre. All these harmless machinations are unknown to the world at large except for the few thousand people in the surrounding villages.

“The owner of the property carries out his part of the deal in much the same way as the missionary. This may continue for as long as two years until everyone is perfectly satisfied that everyone else knows his intentions. As soon as it is clear that the missionary will not take the land at any price, not even as a gift, and that the owner will never part with his property, not even at the price of 10,000 yuan (\$3,000.00) an acre, the way is open for the transaction, which may be carried through with remarkable ease.”

Deceptive Simplicity

To the Westerner of this quotation such bargaining technique must be highly incomprehensible at the start, even though, perforce, he must submit to it—but it cannot be nearly so incomprehensible as our “fixed price technique” is to those who bargain. The idea of a just price is a much more highly organized social phenomenon than the apparently more complex and devious procedures of bargaining. The apparent simplicity of the former is in reality only the *facility of acquired habit*.

If we were to examine instead of a simple exchange, the systems of property tenure, we would find incomparably more extensive and complicated institutions giving “form and shape” to human activity:

What diverse forms has property had, from that primitive form among rude and savage peoples, which may be observed in some places even in our times, to the form of possession in the patriarchal age; and so further to the various forms under tyranny—we are using the word tyranny in its classical sense—and then through the feudal and monarchical forms down to the various types that are to be found in more recent times. (*Quadragesimo Anno*, Paragraph 49.)

Necessary to Life

And in every one of these forms the individuals within them *had to conform* to the institutional pattern (exactly as the missionary in China had to conform), if they wanted to participate in the common life. For this is what it *means* to “participate in the common life”—without a common expectation of a certain pattern of activity during transactions, no social intercourse is possible at all; just as individual life becomes impossible, except insofar as it is sustained by outside help, in a certain strange disease in which all the common habits become somehow jumbled in the mind’s control of them. Thus a victim of this disease, in picking up a telephone receiver, has no assurance at all that his hand will carry it to his ear—it will just as likely go through the motions of brushing his teeth; and an attempt on his part to correct the action may result in motions of combing his hair or sticking the receiver in his tie. On the other hand, when he grasps a glass of milk, his hand may upset it against his ear like a telephone receiver. With all expectation of normal response removed, he is no longer able to meet the necessities of life.

Two Levels of Habit

This profound derangement of normal processes reveals two orders of individual habits: that fundamental order which deals with the *normality* and *abnormality* of action itself; and then, built upon the normality of this order, another order of perfection—of *facility* or *difficulty* of operation—which is the world of art and virtue and their opposites.

It is much the same in the social order: there is one level of social habits (that we have called natural media of life) which by offering expectation of normal response make social intercourse *possible*; and another level (institutions in the strict sense) which is built upon this first level, which make that social intercourse in fact *good* or *bad*; and this last is the order of Social Justice.

Virtue is the Habit of Doing Good

Now this suggests a very interesting and very fruitful parallel: just as an individual is called “good” without qualification, not because of a single good act or good quality, even though it be of heroic proportions, but because of his *good habits*, that is, his *moral virtues*; so a society is not to be called “good” without qualification for the good individuals in it or for some great collective act of generosity or valor, but only for its *good institutions*, that is its *Social Justice*.

And just as vice is as much a habit as virtue; so bad institutions are as much organized as good ones. The only difference is in the *kind* of organization and that is determined by its end: the good to secure the development and perfection of the full human life, and the bad to grasp some sort of immediate advantage regardless of the consequences.

CHAPTER VI The Laws of Social Justice

In paragraph 57 of *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pope Pius XI speaks of “Laws of Social Justice.” Throughout the Encyclical, he has set forth certain of these laws. Without trying to be exhaustive in the matter, let us pick out a few of them for comment. It will be necessary sometime to make a complete analysis; but for an introductory pamphlet like this a mere selection will do; for the ones chosen will give us a good idea of what the others might be.

First Law: That the Common Good Be Kept Inviolable

The first great law, the one mentioned in Paragraph 57 itself, is “that the Common Good of all society be kept inviolable.” The meaning of this law is that in all private dealings, in all exercise of individual justice, the Common Good must be a primary object of solicitude. To attack or to endanger the Common Good in order to attain some private end, no matter how good or how necessary this latter may be in its own order, is social injustice and is wrong. The Common Good is *not* a means for any particular interests; it is *not* a bargaining point in any private quarrel whatsoever; it is *not* a pressure that one may legitimately exercise to obtain any private ends. It is a good so great that very frequently private rights—even inviolable private rights—cannot be exercised until it is safeguarded.

Thus, in a time when the Common Good of a whole nation is threatened by military attack, every man in it has an inviolable right to live in his own home with his wife and children—and none of them who are drafted can do it.

Second Law: Cooperation, Not Conflict

“The unity of human society,” says Pope Pius XI in Paragraph 88 of *Quadragesimo Anno*, “cannot be founded upon opposition.” The only alternative to building a society upon the Common Good, is to try to build it upon some particular good. But the particular good of each individual is different, and any particular good which is falsely made into an ultimate principle must necessarily be *in conflict* with every other particular good.

Two kinds of such conflict are possible: *free competition*, which doesn’t care if others are wiped out; and *dictatorship*, which makes sure they are wiped out. Free competition as a principle of society can only lead to greater and greater conflicts of interests, until finally the society itself is destroyed. Dictatorship is a refinement of the same system, by which one kills off one’s competitors at the beginning instead of at the end, thus making sure (it is hoped) that one at least will survive.

People who advocate such courses have missed the great law of Social Justice that not conflict in any form, but only co-operation, organization for the Common Good, can make a real society.

Third Law: One's First Particular Good Is One's Own Place in the Common Good

The *first* particular good of every individual or group is that that individual or group find its proper place in the Common Good. This is readily seen in paragraph 85 of *Quadragesimo Anno*:

It is easily deduced from what has been said that the interests common to the whole industry or profession should hold first place in these guilds.

Notice that what is here under consideration is what we would call a "particular" good, even though it is "common to the whole industry or profession." It is indeed common to the individual members of the industry or profession, but in relation to the great Common Good of the country, it is a good only of that particular group, therefore a "particular" or private good. Now the Holy Father goes on to explain what the first and most important "particular" good for that group is:

The most important of these interests is to promote the cooperation in the highest degree of each industry and profession for the sake of the Common Good of the country.

This is an interesting statement: The first *particular* good of any group is the *Common* Good above it. But is this really surprising? Haven't we already seen that every single action of every *person* is social and must be directed towards the Common Good? This simply says the same thing for *groups*. In the light of this principle, the *first* interest of every labor union should be the Common Good of the whole country; the *first* interest of the National Association of Manufacturers should be the Common Good of the whole country; the *first* interest of the Farm Bloc should be the Common Good of the whole country; the *first* interest in any industry, in any factory, in any department, at any bench; is the Common Good.

And, to enter a larger field and give our "isolationists" the most unkind cut of all, the *first* of those "national interests" they are continually telling us to safeguard should be the Common Good of the world!

It must be admitted that this is not the way most of us think at the present time, but that is because we have been badly educated.

It must be admitted also that to carry out such a principle in practice looks like too big a job for human nature as we know it; but that is because we are individualists and have missed the point. Of course it is

too big a job if each one of us and each of our groups is individually and separately responsible for the welfare of the human race as a whole. But the point is that the human race as a whole is *social*. Its welfare is preserved by the fact that it is the first interest of every single nation of which it is composed. Those nations are preserved by the fact that they are the first interest of every group: civic, political, social, industrial, religious, cultural, etc., of which they are composed. And these groups are safeguarded by the fact that they are the first interest of every subordinate group of which they are composed. And finally, these subordinate groups are safeguarded by the fact that they are the first interest of every individual who makes them up.

Fourth Law: Each Directly Responsible

This brings us to the next great law of Social Justice. Every individual, regardless of his age or occupation or state of life, is *directly* responsible for the Common Good, because *the Common Good is built up in a hierarchical order*. That is, every great human institution consists of subordinate institutions, which themselves consist of subordinate institutions, on down to the individuals who compose the lowest and most fleeting of human institutions. Since every one of these institutions is directly responsible for the general welfare of the one above it, it follows that every individual is directly responsible for the lower institutions which immediately surround his life, and indirectly (that is, through these and other intermediate institutions) responsible for the general welfare of his whole country and the whole world.

This is a far cry from older ways of thinking that did not see that the Common Good was made up of this vast network of institutions. Especially in economics the theory was prevalent that each person should make his living as best he could and let the Common Good take care of itself, or at best let the state take care of it.

Fifth Law: Higher Institutions Must Never Displace Lower Ones

Another law of Social Justice which stems from the institutional character of the Common Good is that no institution in the vast hierarchy which we have seen can take over the particular actions of an institution or person below it. This is well stated in Paragraph 80 of *Quadragesimo Anno*:

The supreme authority of the state, ought, therefore, to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance, which would otherwise dissipate its efforts greatly. Thereby the state will more freely, powerfully, and effectively do all those things that belong to it alone because it alone can do them. . . . Therefore those in power should be sure that the more perfectly a graduated order is kept among the various associations, in observance of the principle of “subsidiary functions,” the stronger social authority and effectiveness will be and the happier and more prosperous the condition of the state.

In his Encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, Pope Pius XII applies this principle to the state both as regards its subordinate institutions, and as regards the whole human family of which it is a part.

If, in fact, the state lays claim to and directs private enterprises, these, ruled as they are by delicate and complicated internal principles which guarantee and insure the realization of their special aims, may be damaged to the detriment of the public good, by being wrenched from their natural surroundings, that is, from responsible private action.

Then again, to show the relation of the state to the whole human community:

The idea which credits the state with unlimited authority is not simply an error harmful to the life of nations, to their prosperity, and to the larger and well-ordered increase in their wellbeing, but likewise it injures the relations, between peoples, for it breaks the unity of supra-national society, robs the law of nations of its foundation and vigor, leads to the violation of others' rights, and impedes agreement and peaceful intercourse.

A disposition in fact of divinely sanctioned natural order divides the human race into social groups, nations or states, which are mutually independent in organization and in the direction of their internal life. But for all that, the human race is bound together by reciprocal ties, moral and juridical, into a great commonwealth directed to the good of all nations, and ruled by special laws which protect its unity and promote its prosperity.

Sixth Law: Freedom of Association

Another great law of Social Justice is that of *freedom of association*. This derives from the hierarchical organization of the institutions of society which we have already examined. If every natural group of individuals has a right to its own Common Good and a duty towards the next highest Common Good, it is evident that such a group has the right to organize itself formally in view of the Common Good. In times past, as both Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI pointed out, capital tried to deny this right of association to labor. In our own lifetime, we have seen governments deny this right of association to large groups of their citizens. Totalitarian systems of government, whether fascist or communist in character, live by the denial of the right of association to anyone but the party in power.

It is interesting to see how Pope Pius XI insists upon the word "free" in the following passage of *Quadragesimo Anno* which sets forth this principle:

87. Moreover, just as inhabitants of a town are wont to found associations with the widest diversity of purposes, which each is quite *free* to join or not, so those engaged in the same industry or profession will combine with one another into associations equally *free* for purposes connected in some manner with the pursuit of the calling itself. Since these *free* associations are clearly and lucidly explained by Our Predecessor of illustrious memory, we consider it enough to emphasize this one point fully. People are quite *free*, not only to found such associations, which are a matter of *private* order and *private right* but also in respect to them “*freely* to adopt the organization and the rule which they judge most appropriate to achieve their purpose. The same *freedom* must be asserted for founding associations that go beyond the boundaries of individual callings. And may these *free* organizations now flourishing and rejoicing in their salutary fruits, set before themselves the task of preparing the way, in conformity with the mind of Christian social teaching, for those larger and more important guilds, industries and professions, which we mentioned before, and make every possible effort to bring them to realization.

Social Justice demands this freedom not only in order that each social group may be properly organized to make its own unique and necessary contribution to the general Common Good, but also so that the group may constantly safeguard the welfare of those who make it up. If effective control of any group ever escapes from its members, then that group no longer is responsive to the needs of its members. Rather it satisfies the ambitions and the plans of the individuals who have “captured” the group for their own private ends. The well-known “boring from within” tactics of Communists who seek control of organizations in order to use them for their own political ends, are examples of such usurpation of groups for purposes other than their natural ones.

Any group which would find itself thus “taken over” by agitators or gangsters for their own ends, would have an obligation in Social Justice to shake off such leadership and make the group once more representative of *its members’* common interests.

But it is not only by such usurpation from without that groups can fail to perform their proper function of safeguarding the interests of all their members. Since all human institutions are in constant flux, as we have seen, it is essential that their members keep constantly on the alert to make the changing organization of the group correspond to the changing circumstances as time goes on. If this is not done, then every change which disturbs the balance of the Common Good, will throw unwarranted advantage to some individuals or groups within the institutions, and by the same fact will withhold their proper share of the Common Good from the others. This state of things is another reason why groups must be *free*, for without such freedom they cannot readily adapt themselves to new situations.

Seventh Law: All Vital Interests Should Be Organized

The last law of Social Justice which we will consider is that *all* real and vital interests of life *should be organized*, that is, should be deliberately made to conform to the requirements of the Common Good.

Here is where the individualistic thinker rebels at the doctrine of Social Justice. Seeing the great complexity of life and the vast number of vital interests of which it is made up, he maintains that one who would try to organize every vital interest could do nothing else during his whole life since this alone would be a full-time job that would never end.

In one sense he is right—it is a full-time job that never ends. But he is wrong in thinking that one would somehow have to take “time out” from his ordinary life in order to do this job. The vast and complex institutions of human life can be controlled and directed only by those who live *in* them, and only *while* they live in them.

Here we meet Pope Pius XI’s great principle “The first apostles to the workers ought to be workers.” This is the principle which in Catholic Action has become known as “Milieu Specialization,” specialization according to the “natural medium” of each one’s ordinary daily life.

The theory is that each one’s own life is so complex and so specialized, that he alone is a “specialist” in that life. In the same way, each group’s own interests are so complex and so particular to it, that only its members are specialists in the needs and aspirations and hopes and fears of that group.

Anyone who would try to run such a group “from outside” would evidently be a rank amateur who would not know the score. Therefore the group *must* be run by those who are in it, and in order to run the group they must get together and decide in common the means they will adopt, in other words they must *organize* their life.

However when we say they *must* organize their life we do not mean that they can do anything else. The “organization” of life which we speak of here is specifically “organization *for the Common Good*.” If the people in a group are not conscious of this necessity of organizing for the Common Good, it is not true that they do not organize; what *is* true is that they organize *against* the Common Good. For it must be remembered that since man is a social being every one of his actions is social, that is it is bound up with the lives of others. When he neglects to see to it that his social actions contribute to the Common Good of those others with whose lives they are bound up, it is evident that he does not change his social nature. He still remains a social being, and his actions are still bound up with the lives of those around him. The difference is that those actions, being undirected towards the Common Good, may or may not now contribute to that Common Good—in fact, most usually will *not* so contribute. These actions become habitual within the group and gradually the whole group becomes disorganized; the Common Good is destroyed and the individual perfection of those who are in the group is lessened or destroyed.

It is not true to think that man has a choice between organization or no organization within his life which is essentially social. The only choice he has is between organization that *takes care* of the Common Good, and organization which *does not* take care of the Common Good. Either way his actions will be organized, will be social; but in the first case they will be socially *good* and in the second they will be socially *bad*.

In view of all this it is evident that the principle pronounced above—that every vital and real interest of life *must* be organized for the Common Good—does not impose a new way of life upon anyone, but does impose a new purpose in life upon all; namely, the purpose of promoting the Common Good of one’s neighbors, of those with whom one’s life is bound up.

Once more, this list of seven “laws of Social Justice” does not pretend to be complete. Others would have to be added in a more complete discussion.

CHAPTER VII Characteristics of Social Justice

First Characteristics: Only By Members of Groups

It might be good in order to make the notion of Social Justice clearer, to compare its characteristics with those of individual justice which are already well-known. The first great mark of Social Justice is that it cannot be performed by individuals as individuals, but only by individuals as *members of groups*. Let us give an example. When John Jones pays a debt to Bill Smith he is acting as an individual. *He* contracted the debt and *he* is paying it. We would be tempted to say it is nobody else's business.

Example of Indirect or "Commanded" Act of Social Justice

But there is more to it than that. When he pays his debt, he is continuing a laudable tradition in his society, that debts are paid when they come due. By paying it promptly he contributes to the conviction which is prevalent in his society, that debts are to be repaid promptly. He not only furnishes a payment for his private debt, which is whatever sum of money he happens to owe, but he also contributes payment of a debt which he owes to his society, namely, support of the principle that at the proper time debts are to be paid. Moreover, when Bill Smith gets paid, he is in a position to pay his own debts to somebody else; and thus the healthy tradition of debt paying is still further strengthened. Moreover, the confidence which men have in each other's integrity, a confidence upon which all our social living together is built, is certainly promoted by the fact that both men discharged their obligations when those obligations became due.

Now this "tradition," this "confidence" are *social* things, marks of the society as a whole, which set off that society of honest men from other societies of thieves or cheats or confidence men. These acts then, insofar as they contribute to the health of that society, are *indirect* acts of Social Justice (promoting the Common Good) although they are *directly* acts of individual justice. Now notice that the individual justice is done as an individual. It is John Jones or Bill Smith who pays the debt of John Jones or Bill Smith. But when by their action they contributed to the health of the whole society, it was not merely as John Jones or Bill Smith that they acted but as *members of that society*.

Example of Direct Act of Social Justice

This is even more clear if we were to describe not an indirect act of Social Justice but a direct one. Suppose for instance, that John Jones' and Bill Smith's society have a long tradition of *not* paying debts. As a result of this fact that nobody ever pays debts, everybody is suspicious of everybody else, and no one will let out money or goods even in an emergency of his neighbor. Emergencies, however, have a habit of coming up, and people suffer. Likewise, all jobs that are too big financially for one person, go

undone, because no one will trust another sufficiently to go into partnership. The consequence is that the economic life of the community as a whole is suffering more and more; and the people are gradually being reduced to destitution.

We will suppose that John Jones notices this condition, and sees what the cause of it is: the whole group is not honest. He sets out, then, to change the group—to reorganize it into an honest community.

The Wrong Way: Individualistic

The question is: What can John Jones do as an individual? He might, for instance, decide to give the community “a good example” of honesty. That is, he might lend out all *his* money to others, thus showing that he trusts them, and undertake always to pay *his* debts exactly on time. It sounds good; but, remembering that what is wrong with that community is that everyone considers it *normal* to be dishonest, we might readily calculate the chances that John Jones’ heroic honesty and trust would have of reforming the community. When he starts handing out his money freely, it is rather obvious that most of his neighbors will try to grab off as much of it as they can while the grabbing is good. When he is finally reduced to poverty, it is unlikely that his example will attract many followers.

His mistake was to attack a *social* evil with only *individual* means.

The Right Way: Social

How should he have gone about it?

First of all, he should recognize frankly that he, as an *individual*, is *helpless* before the accumulated evil of the unjust *system in force*. Then he should go out for help. If he is wise he will not tackle the whole community at once, but will look around among his friends or acquaintances and try to find other people who are as dissatisfied as he himself is with the poverty-ridden condition of their community.

With these chosen souls he would sit down to study the sad condition of their community and to see what could be done about it. When it became clear that dishonesty was the big obstacle in the way of a good life in the community, they could very well begin to study the necessity of honesty in their own relations, especially with each other. When all of them are convinced that honesty is absolutely essential to a good life together, it will become possible for them to agree among themselves that they will trust each other. Furthermore, they can agree to stand together against anyone of their number who goes back on his promise to be good. Once this is accomplished they can begin helping each other out, lending money when necessity arises, or joining forces when big jobs come along that they cannot handle individually. Furthermore, since they recognize that it is a social problem which affects the whole community they will be careful not to help anybody outside their “reform” group (which can be trusted

to be honest), unless this outside person *joins the group* and himself takes the obligation to meet his just debts.

And since they know very well what false ideas the community has on honesty, they will make it a condition of joining their group that the newcomers study the necessity of honesty as much as they themselves studied it when they started out—in other words, they will attempt to *form* their new members to honesty. Actually they are setting up a new “social conscience” to take the place of the old falsified “social conscience” which had made dishonesty a normal thing.

Without going further into this example, it is already evident that in this *social way of action*—this *organization of the community*—something can really be done. These organized men are going to show to their disorganized community an example, not of going heroically broke as a testimony to honesty, but of arriving at economic security by the operation of honesty.

This example will attract imitators—in fact, the smaller group will deliberately go out to look for imitators and train them to imitate.

Here you have the difference between individual action and social action and it is clear that Social Justice is never done by an individual as an individual, but only by an individual in cooperation, in organization with others.

Second Characteristic: It Takes Time

A second characteristic of Social Justice (which comes directly from the fact that it can be done only by groups) is that it moves slowly and gradually. When John Jones owes Bill Smith fifteen dollars on January 2nd, he must pay Bill Smith fifteen dollars on January 2nd or be doing wrong. Individual justice is done all at once at a definite time. But not so with Social Justice. In the example above of the change from a dishonest to an honest community it is clear that the process took some time—probably a long time.

An even better example is the one that Pope Pius XI proposed; namely, that of an individual employer who was helpless to insure justice. The remedy which the Pope suggested was that this employer had the duty to organize with the other employers so as to prevent unjust competition and permit fair treatment to the workers.

Here is an interesting point: When the process of organization begins it is clear that the employer in the Holy Father’s example is *not* paying a living wage. Furthermore, and this is important, *he will not pay a living wage* until he has succeeded in reorganizing the industry in cooperation with the other employers. For only in the measure in which that reorganization succeeds, will his helplessness to pay a living wage disappear. Yet from the very moment that he *begins* reorganizing that industry with his fellow employers, and all during the time which it takes to reorganize it, he is practicing Social Justice.

When he hears such doctrine, an individualistic moralist will howl to high heaven. He will say that the payment of a sub-living wage is unjust, is wrong; and that the employer is not allowed to cooperate in that injustice. Direct cooperation in evil, he will say, is wrong in all circumstances, and cannot be permitted. Either the employer must pay a living wage, or get out of the dirty business.

Evidently a man who would maintain so intransigent an opposition to evil would have a thirst for justice, but if he should succeed in driving out of that business the only employer who wants to reorganize it, it is difficult to see what good he has accomplished.

Pope Pius XI, in the same discourse on the fundamental instability of human institutions which was quoted earlier, has this to say about the necessary time lag in social work: "To tend to perfection, but to do what is possible: there you have the program to which human forces are permitted to pretend. If God demands something more, then He does it Himself."

This compromise with reality, this willingness to accomplish one's end slowly and painfully, this "collaboration" in an evil institution until the change can be accomplished, this "remaining in a dirty business" in order to clean it up—all this is hateful to good people who have not grasped the essence of Social Justice.

In the past, these individualists, or "radical nonparticipationists" as they like to call themselves (from their doctrine of "radical non-participation in evil") could be excused for their attitude, because no one was very clear on how a social problem could be attacked anyhow; and their theory of heroic resistance and even martyrdom was about as good as any. Now, however, that the doctrine of Social Justice has been completed under the inspired pen of Pope Pius XI, many of these good people are going to have to change their fundamental assumptions and ideas. If they do not, they will find themselves willy-nilly "collaborating in evil"—the great evil of social injustice.

Third Characteristic: Nothing is Impossible

Another characteristic of Social Justice, which was already pointed out in Chapter Two, is that in Social Justice there is *never any such thing as helplessness*. No problem is ever too big or too complex, no field is ever too vast, for the methods of this Social Justice. Problems that were agonizing in the past and were simply dodged, even by serious and virtuous people, can now be solved with ease by any school child. Lest this statement seem too extreme, let us take an actual example of such an insoluble problem of the past.

A Common Problem

The following problem was proposed on a national radio hookup:

I know many businessmen, lawyers, physicians, who lament the trend to the unethical in the special worlds in which they operate. They tell me that the tide is running against them, that too many of their rivals have reduced business ethics and professional ethics to three principles: 1. Everybody is doing it; 2. If you don't do it, someone else will; and 3. You can't do business nowadays with old-fashioned principles. Especially in the metropolitan cities, they say, the degeneration is obvious. They blame this set of persons and that, but they all seem to agree that decline, if not actual decay, is upon us.

"It's easy enough," they add, "for you preachers to tell us to stand firm, to hew to the line, and all that. But we have families to support, homes to maintain, food and clothing to buy. . . . We must do what the others do or be sunk. The crowd is running all one way; we cannot forever buck the stream!"

This is a sincere and straightforward statement of a problem as common as any to be met at the present time. In fact, it is an understatement: to complete the picture we should add that the laws of our secularized society are usually in favor of the crowd which is running all one way! It is not too hard to see that this is identically the same problem which Pope Pius XI presented in a passage which we have quoted several times: "It happens all too frequently, under the salary system, that the individual employer is helpless to insure justice."

The radio preacher happened to be a rather pronounced individualist, and the best answer he could give to his own problem was the following: "Right is right if nobody does it. Wrong is wrong if everybody does it. What the businessman needs, and what the professional man needs is a new declaration of independence."

No Solution

Notice that the first part of this answer dodges the question. The businessman had said in effect, that he as an individual was helpless to insure justice. He knew the system was wrong, but he did not know how to buck it. The only information contained in the answer was that there *is* such a thing as right and wrong. If the businessman had not known *that* perfectly well *before* he stated his problem, he certainly would not have called his system *wrong*!

The second part of the reply is more to the point; but that "new declaration of independence" which sounds so nice in a speech, *is precisely* what the businessman meant by the last three words of his complaint: "We must do what the others do *or be sunk*." This certainly is not much help!

It is difficult to see what other answers could have been given from an individualistic point of view. The speaker could of course have told the businessman to "use his own judgment," or to "do the best he

can,” but this once more is not much help; and the businessman is looking for help. The only other solution would be to tell the businessman that since he *has to* make a living, and *has to* pay his debts and meet his other obligations, he should go ahead with his business, since its injustice is something which he cannot help, and which is only indirectly willed. This may indeed offer the businessman a chance to save his individual soul while precariously balancing on a “good intention” in the midst of evil, but it certainly does nothing to remedy the evil.

The Right Answer

No other answer, except a frank admission that the problem is insoluble, could be given from an *individualistic* point of view. The answer which Pope Pius XI gave to his own statement of the same problem was not individualistic at all—it was *social*; namely, that the employer who found himself thus helpless to insure justice *had a duty to organize, among the employers, institutions* which would make the practice of justice possible. How this organization would be carried out we have seen in the simple example of social action above (the unjust community).

Once more notice how directly and clearly the Pope solved that problem which was *absolutely insoluble* to the radio speaker who had an individualistic philosophy. That is why individuals, at least from now on, will not be very bright. Not only that, but they will be downright wrong—failing against Social Justice.

Fourth Characteristic: Eternal Vigilance

Another characteristic of Social Justice is that *its work is never finished*. This goes beyond what was said above about the time-lag, about the slowness, with which Social Justice is accomplished. The point is that human institutions are always changing, even the most fundamental ones, in the words of Pope Pius XI already quoted, and these changes must always be directed to serve the Common Good. We, as human beings, cannot possibly foresee all the consequences of our actions. The inevitable result is that many of these consequences bring about unforeseen evil results; and as we go through life, acting always without ultimate realization of the consequences of our actions, these evil results pile up, one on top of the other, until many aspects of our social life are disorganized—have become unjust. When we try to correct that injustice even by social action it is clear that our actions once more will have consequences which we cannot foresee, and that many of those new consequences will also be evil.

Besides that, there are a lot of other people who are not even trying to be good; and the evil consequences of their acts also are continually piling up in all the institutions of life. The result is that Social Justice is not only a full-time job as we have seen before, but it is also an *all-time* job.

A Digression

Here we ought to digress a little bit to show how Pope Pius XI, who brought the theory of Social Justice to completion, provided also an instrument whereby the Christian world could perform this full-time, and all-time, job.

This instrument, which Pope Pius XI called Catholic Action, was both *world-wide*, in order to be able to face the greatest and most widespread of the modern evils, and at the same time was *specialized* in every walk of life so that in all that vast organization, not a single “amateur” would be at work. When a doctor for instance, or a banker talks to a hall full of workers on the dangers of Communism, we may safely presume that all he knows about his subject is what he read in the papers; but when a worker himself talks to fellow-workers about the dangers of Communism, he knows the hopes and fears, the injustices, the resentments that have made Communism so attractive to the working masses of the world.

Communism is only one example of such widespread evils. The institution of birth control, to take only one more example, is every bit as widespread, and probably as devastating in the damage which it is doing to Christian civilization.

Many older Catholic organizations have not seen what Pope Pius XI was trying to do with Catholic Action, and they spend a great deal of their time trying to get themselves called “Catholic Action” without having the means to accomplish its purposes. If they would keep their eyes upon the two extremes pointed out here, namely a *world-wide* organization capable of attacking directly the greatest evils of the present day, and at the same time a movement which has *specialized competence* inside every natural medium of life, they would not make this mistake.

It can be seen at a glance that if Catholic Action were organized according to the directions and norms which Pope Pius XI laid down, and which the present Holy Father is continuing, then the work of organization of every aspect of life, whose sheer vastness terrorizes or discourages the individualist, would be greatly facilitated.

Not, however, that Catholic Action works directly in the social order or the “temporal order” as it could better be called. It does not. What it does is to *organize all* Catholics and keep them *formed and ready*, so that when the time comes for them to enter into the reorganization of any aspect of social life, they have the practical unity, and they have the specialized competence, to do it, and to do it well.

No one who appreciates the concept of Social Justice, as it has come from the pen of Pope Pius XI, can afford to neglect his other concept of Catholic Action. They complete and explain each other.

Fifth Characteristic: Effectiveness

A kind of corollary of the characteristic of Social Justice which we have just seen—namely, the characteristic that it is never finished—is that one’s work for the Common Good *must be effective*. It is not enough to do something with “a good intention” for the Common Good, and then to turn one’s back. One must “keep his eye on the ball,” and whenever the ball is not in the best position, one must work to put it there. This means that the final criterion of whether or not Social Justice is being practiced, is whether or not society is good. To put it in Pope Pius XI’s own words, from paragraphs 51 and 52 of the Encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*:

If Social Justice is satisfied, the result will be an intense activity in economic life as a whole, pursued in tranquillity and order. This activity will be proof of the health of the social body, just as the health of the human body is recognized in the undisturbed regularity and perfect efficiency of the whole organism.

But Social Justice cannot be said to have been satisfied as long as workingmen are denied a salary that will enable them to secure proper sustenance for themselves and for their family; as long as they are denied the opportunity of acquiring a modest fortune and forestalling the plague of universal pauperism; as long as they cannot make suitable provision through public or private insurance for old-age, for periods of illness, and for unemployment.

Sixth Characteristic: You Can’t “Take It Or Leave It Alone”

Another corollary of this characteristic of Social Justice (that it is never finished) is that it embraces a *rigid obligation*. In the past when it was not seen very clearly how the duty of reform would fall upon the individual conscience, the idea became widespread that reform was a kind of special vocation, like that to the priesthood, or the religious life. It was all very good for those people who liked that sort of thing, but if one did not like that sort of thing, he left it alone.

All that is changed! Since we know that everyone, even the weakest and youngest of human beings, can work *directly* on the Common Good at the level where he lives, and since each one “has the duty” to reorganize his own natural medium of life whenever it makes the practice of individual virtue difficult or impossible, then every single person must face the direct and strict obligation of reorganizing his life and the life around him, so that the individual perfection both of himself and of his immediate neighbors will become possible. This idea should not be taken alone, it should be held only in conjunction with the characteristics we have already seen, namely, that one cannot practice Social Justice alone as an individual, but only with others; and that the realization of Social Justice takes time.

A Footnote to a Chapter of Ethics

Now for a final remark, which is not exactly a characteristic of Social Justice, but rather a consequence of our present understanding of this virtue. In the past, when the way in which Social Justice could be realized was not too well understood, what is known to moralists as “the principle of double effect” was applied to the social order as well as to the individual order. This principle runs about as follows: “It is permitted to perform an action in itself good or indifferent, which has a double or multiple effect, namely, one or the other good effect and one or the other bad, on condition: first, that the good effect is immediate; secondly, that the end of the agent is honest; and thirdly, that there exists a proportionately grave cause.” This principle is necessary to free the individual conscience from responsibility for evil effects which are thus “indirectly” willed, and so permit the accomplishment of the normal and necessary duties of life. Its ultimate basis is, of course, the absence of power to impede the evil effect: “No one is held to the impossible; hence, no one, if he does not do that which he cannot do, sins by omission.”

When for example a doctor can stop an otherwise fatal hemorrhage *only* by ligating a blood vessel which at the same time sustains the life of a non-viable fetus, the fact of the matter is that the life of the un-born child is then simply beyond his control and hence outside his responsibility; so that when he ligates the blood vessel to stop the hemorrhage, and the un-born child dies as a consequence, there is nothing more to be said or done. If some means were open to his art to preserve that life after the ligation, the responsibility of the surgeon would still be engaged and he would have to try to save that life.

How About the Social Order?

Now comes the crucial question: Is this absence of power to impede the evil effect, ever verified in the social order? We have seen the answer above: no problem can ever be too big, too complex, too widespread, too vast for Social Justice to tackle. There is in the field of Social Justice no such thing as an impossible situation. The conclusion is that the principle “of double effect” does not belong in the social order in the same way that it belongs in the individual order. We have seen this already in the example of Social Justice which Pope Pius XI cited. His “individual employer” was “helpless to insure justice.” In the field of *individual* justice, therefore, that is the end of the story. Nothing more is to be said. The employer simply goes on paying an unjust wage (*materially* unjust) for the very simple reason that he is *helpless* to do anything else. But how about the social problem, the fact that his industry is badly organized and thus forces this helplessness upon him. In this *social* field there is no helplessness whatever. He can change the industry (by social, organized action) whenever he wants to start organizing, and he had better not wait too long because the words of the Sovereign Pontiff are explicit: “*He has the duty.*”

Another example: Suppose a senator is faced by a bill which he judges necessary for the Common Good, but which has a “rider” attached to it which he thinks to be unjust.

In individual justice he is permitted to vote for that measure which he has judged necessary, despite the fact that in so doing he also permits the unjust rider to become law. This latter effect is willed by him only “indirectly” insofar as he cannot safeguard the Common Good without permitting it. Formerly, we would have thought that that, too, was the end of the story, as for the surgical operation outlined above. He need give the unjust effect no further thought, because he was helpless to prevent its occurrence.

Now, however, we know differently. He can vote for the necessary bill as before, but it was a social organization (legislative procedure) which linked together that necessary bill and the unjust rider. It was this social organization, this system of law, which prevented him from doing full justice—that is from safeguarding the Common Good completely by the exclusion of the rider from the bill which was necessary. Faced with this helplessness, he has the duty to organize socially against it. That is, he must after the passage of the bill, or even before it, if that is possible, round up sufficient support among the other senators to defeat the rider or to repeal it. This process may take a long time, but he *must keep working at it to be just*.

Conclusion

The theory of Social Justice which has been outlined in this pamphlet is tremendously important and far-reaching. No mere pamphlet could hope to outline the whole theory or to explore all its consequences. That is why this pamphlet is called only an *introduction* to Social Justice.

The completed doctrine of Social Justice places in our hands instruments of such power as to be inconceivable to former generations.

But let us be clear about what is new and what is old. None of the elements of this theory are new. Institutions, and institutional action, the idea of the Common Good, the relationship of individual to Common Good—all these things are as old as the human race itself. There is nothing more new in those things than in the school boy's discovery that what he has been speaking is prose; nor must we ever believe that God made man a two-legged creature, and then waited for Aristotle to make him rational. Moreover, much of the actual *application* of these principles to practical life is to be found in older writers under the heading "political prudence."

When all that is admitted, there is still something tremendously new and tremendously important in this work of Pope Pius XI. The power that we have now to change any institution of life, the grip that we have on the social order as a whole, was always *there* but *we* did not know it and we did not know how to use it.

Now we know.

That is the difference.

Questions On Introduction to Social Justice

Chapter I

1. What two Encyclicals of Pope Pius XI show most clearly his greatness as a social figure?
2. How did the “scientific” sociologists try to explain the radical instability of social phenomena? How did the moralists react? Did these tendencies have bad effects?
3. What was the real problem?
4. What is Pope Pius XI’s opinion on the instability of human institutions?
5. Did this opinion extend even to the most fundamental institutions? Was this the usual way of seeing the problem?
6. Why could the Pope venture so boldly into the “no man’s land” between the moralists and the sociologists?
7. What are the great principles which Pope Pius XI intended to apply to the social problem?
8. What was Social Justice called before about 1850?
9. Outline the history of the development of the doctrine of Social Justice.
10. In what way was St. Thomas’ doctrine of Social Justice superior to Aristotle? What important question however did he fail to ask concerning Social Justice?

Chapter II

1. What do most commentators miss when reading *Quadragesimo Anno*?
2. What is usually misunderstood in Paragraph 71 of *Quadragesimo Anno*?
3. It is ever impossible to meet the demands of individual justice? Is the one who finds himself in this circumstance morally guilty?
4. In such an impossibility, is the solution to be sought in individual justice, or in Social Justice?
5. Why is it certain that Social Justice is the same thing as the traditional “Legal Justice?”
6. In Paragraph 71 of *Quadragesimo Anno* what must be done if existing circumstances do not permit a living family wage? What is the common misunderstanding of the demands of Social Justice as set forth in this paragraph?

7. In the past about all that has been demanded for Social Justice was a “good intention” for the Common Good. Is anything more demanded by Pope Pius XI’s doctrine of Social Justice? Show how this demand is set forth in Paragraph 74 of the Encyclical.
8. What three alternatives to Social Justice does Pius XI condemn as guides or norms of society? Why?
9. What does Pius XI mean by the statement that Social Justice must give “form and shape” to social and economic life?
10. In adopting the new term Social Justice, what meaning did Pope Pius XI seem to leave for the traditional term Legal Justice? Was this an acceptance of popular understanding?
11. Did Pope Pius XI develop the doctrine of Social Charity with the same fullness of detail with which he developed that of Social Justice? What work therefore remains to be done?
12. What is the evil of trying to capture the very system of economic life itself for private and selfish ends?
13. We have seen that in individual justice an employer may be helpless to pay a just wage. Is it right to look on Social Justice as some kind of additional claim on the employer by which he must pay a just wage anyhow? If this is the wrong idea, what is the right one?
14. Outline the summary of his own teaching on Social Justice which Pope Pius XI inserted into the Encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*.

Chapter III

1. How does Pope Pius XI base the theory of Justice on the dignity of the human personality?
2. What are the “props” or supports needed for realization of human dignity?
3. Distinguish between a failure against charity and justice.
4. What is *Social Charity* and on what is it based?
5. What does Social Justice require of society? Why?
6. What was the traditional view of justice, and how has Pope Pius XI improved upon it?
7. Why isn’t commutative justice the “most perfect” form of justice? Could the same be said about charity?
8. Could you give any reason why “other goods of human perfection are *unobtainable* without the Common Good”?

9. The duty of meeting the obligations of Social Justice, once they are understood and recognized is “both rigid and very serious.” Why?
10. What has the result of past thinking done for Social Justice? Why?

Chapter IV

1. Why must every act conform to Social Justice, or be sinful?
2. Can an isolated individual practice Social Justice? What does this imply?
3. Give a definition of milieu. Of institution. How do they differ?
4. How are people to discharge their duty of Social Justice?
5. Give Pope Pius XI’s reason for the necessity of institutions.
6. What is the three-fold duty of institutions?
7. What is the relationship existing between the Common Good and every individual?
8. What is the Common Good? What is it not?
9. Why can each individual have direct care of the Common Good at his level?

Chapter V

1. Show by an example how buying and selling are highly organized.
2. Why is the “fixed priced technique” apparently more simplified than bargaining?
3. What is meant by “participating in the common life”?
4. What is the function of the first level of social habits? What is the function of the order of Social Justice?
5. What makes society “good”?
6. What determines the “kind of organization”? Why?
7. When is an organization “bad”?

Chapter VI

1. Can it be stated dogmatically that there are seven and only seven laws of Social Justice?

2. At what cost must the Common Good be kept inviolate? Why?
3. If society is not founded upon the Common Good, what other good can it be founded upon? What, then, logically follows?
4. What advantages does co-operation (Common Good) have over dictatorship or free competition (particular good)?
5. With regard to the third mentioned law, what is *your* big job for Social Justice?
6. *You* are responsible for the general welfare of your country and further of the WHOLE WORLD. Why?
7. What reason does Pope Pius XI give for the fifth mentioned law?
8. Give *three* reasons why there must be such a thing as “freedom of association.”
9. In the seventh law, what is meant by the word “organized”? List a few “real and vital interests” and show how they could be “organized.”
10. What reason can you give for this statement: “The vast and complex institutions of human life can justly be controlled and directed only by those who live *in* them, and only *while* they live in them.”
11. Why can there be NO alternative in the question of “organizing”?

Chapter VII

1. What are the six characteristics of Social Justice? Which do you consider the most important? Why?
2. Is there any distinction made between an Indirect or “Commanded” act of Social Justice and one that is Direct? What is it? Is it a “real” distinction?
3. What two ways of action are mentioned in connection with the reorganization of a community? Which is the Right Way? Why?
4. What connection does the first characteristic have with Catholic Action?
5. Why can there not be such a thing as one precise act of Social Justice?
6. Why does the individualistic moralist “howl” at such a doctrine as Social Justice? Is he justified?
7. What changes will the “individualist” have to make in this thinking since Pope Pius XI has definitely stated his view on Social Justice?

8. What is the Holy Father's view of organization for the betterment of social conditions?
9. Why is the individual evidently helpless in going against the so-called principles of business and professional ethics? What must he do if he wishes to counteract these principles? Must he try to counteract them? Why?
10. Why do human institutions demand eternal vigilance on the part of social-actionists? In what direction must the social actionist always tend?
11. Why can Catholic Action face all problems (*world-wide* and local) effectively?
12. Does the *world-wide* view of Catholic Action demand too much from the individual? What other element does Catholic Action consider?
13. Does the Holy Father's concept of Social Justice consequently demand Catholic Action groups?
14. Why is "a good intention" for the betterment of the Common Good insufficient? Does Social Justice demand more than good will? If so, what?
15. What is the final criterion as to whether or not Social Justice is being practiced? What does Pope Pius XI say about this?
16. Is there any difference in the method of reform as practiced in the past in comparison to the method demanded by Social Justice today? Why *must* it be different to be effective?
17. Why does not the principle of "double effect" belong in the social order as it does in the individual order?
18. Is the theory of Social Justice of recent origin? What do we know about Social Justice that has been neglected till now? What are the consequences of this knowledge?