

The Church And Social Disorders

There is a certain amount of amusing tragedy in seeing the pattern of history unveiling before our eyes. When things go to men's satisfaction they are quite willing to dispense with the guidance of God. But when, left to their own resources, they have thoroughly mismanaged their affairs, they turn to Him, that is, to His living voice on earth, to put order into the confusion they have created. But when the Church begins to be faulted as responsible for these social evils, the whole thing ceases to be amusing.

This current is fast becoming the favorite of a large segment of national reformists. The Church is being accused as the cause of the social and economic disorders so widely prevalent in the country today. She is pictured as not playing her due part in striving to remedy these evils. Her political and social encyclicals are hailed as brilliant and magnificent, but condemned as without practical repercussion in the real life. It is normally assumed, within the reformists' circle, that the Church is faithfully aligned with the social and economic establishments which are practically unjust.

These accusations are not totally fair, but neither are they to be dismissed as without any objective basis. In the first place it is unfair to accuse the Church of shying away from social involvement. The Second Vatican Council tells us that the social shaping of our world is part of our duty to God: "Christ's redemptive work . . . involves also the renewal of the whole temporal order . . . the Church's mission is to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the Gospel." (AA. 5); "God's plan for the world is that men should march together to restore the temporal sphere of things and develop it unceasingly" (*ibid.* 7).

The Church must be socially "involved" in the restoration of justice in our social structure — but with a style uniquely her own. Her involvement, it must be said, in social order should not be seen as the *only* and the *all* of her existence in the world. The Church is not a purely earthly society, formed to attain ends

of a temporal order. She is and must remain before all else what her Founder intended: the instrument of mankind's eternal salvation. Her primary concern is with spiritual and not temporal interests; not to busy itself with economic or political reforms, but to save civilization from itself by revealing to men the true end of life and the true nature of reality; not to reform or devise new economic systems, but to *transform the economists and social workers themselves*. It is man she undertakes to change not systems. If man became what he ought, systems will become what they ought too. What good will a change of system be if after all the people do not change?

In a more concrete level, the priest is not a priest to reform society, but to save souls. He is not given the task of increasing material welfare among men, but of providing for their spiritual nourishment. Whatever the time and the place in which he carries out his ministry, if he wishes to remain equal to his sublime function, he must always and above all consider himself as the man of the spiritual order, the mediator between God and men.

For this reason the accusations against the Church are unfair; but they are not completely baseless.

It has been rightly pointed out that the Church after all is not the hierarchy nor only the priests nor only the doctrines. The baptized laity are also the Church. As Pope Pius XII said twenty-five years ago: "laymen and women must become increasingly aware of the fact that they do not simply belong to the Church. *They are the Church.*" Now to be the Church means to live the life of the Church, and to live the life of the Church is to assume the mission of the Church, to be alive to the concern of the Church. Her maternal concern manifested so acutely in her social teachings must be realized in concrete situations *through her individual members*. The laity with their special training and condition in secular affairs have a decisive role to play in realizing the Church preoccupations for a fruitful, effective, and just temporal order animated by Christian ideals (LG 36).

In the light of this conciliar teachings, it will not be amiss to observe that the existing evils are largely due to the abandonment of Christian social principles by those people who call themselves Christians. The Church is not criticized for her encyclicals and social teachings—they are all sound and acceptable. It is not the lukewarm response and the indifference of her children to translate these social principles into practice. The real culprits

of social disorders in our country are those people who apply to the solutions of life's problems and the regulation of life's conduct, principles that deviated from the principles taught by Christ and echoed by the living magisterium of Christ — the Church. They are responsible to the exact degree of that deviation. This fact provides the basis for the afore-mentioned accusations against the Church, and it also points to the solution.

If only rulers and ruled alike listen to Her voice, follow her teachings, this country might not cease to be a country of tears, but it will most certainly cease to be a vale of savage strife; not a country of earthly paradise, but one in which we can see the realization of man's dreams of a satisfying order of things.