



Civilize Before You Christianize

By SIXTO K. ROXAS

There is a sense in which it is true to say that the immutable Catholic Church must keep up with the changing world. And that is in this sense: that in each age, there is always one particular set of Catholic doctrines out of the unchanging treasury, that must be stressed.

You might say Catholicism is an armory of varied weapons. Each age brings a new enemy which must be vanquished with a particular weapon. Or to change the metaphor, Catholicism is a medicine chest. Each age is afflicted with a different disease which can be cured with a definite medicine.

The disease of this age is the social cancer. And out of the Catholic chest must come, the Christian concept of social justice. The monster that approaches with fire and fury is Communism. Out of the armory must come the sword of God-given human rights.

But these weapons must be wielded by men. Abstract doctrines are useless if men do not realize them in

practice. Medicines do not cure, unless they are applied.

In no place is this application more needed than in the Philippines. Our country is a seething volcano of social discontent. Despite all the attempts of our President to dismiss all warnings of our gathering storm as "foreign-inspired propaganda," still the fact cannot be denied.

The Philippines is not a paradise of plenty for the workingman, and that means for 17,000,000 of its 19,000,000 Filipinos. The city laborer, if he is skilled, is expected to keep an average family of five not only housed, clothed and fed but also provided with education and healthy recreation with the enormous sum of ₱7.30 a day, — a task which would have been impossible even before the war. The task is even more frightening now when every peso, by pre-war standards is worth only 22 centavos. And these are the maximum wages. Unskilled laborers receive about two thirds that amount. And they are still millionaires com-

pared to the farm workers who receive less than two pesos a day.

And what happens when these miserable laborers try to organize themselves into legitimate unions to bargain for the human treatment which their dignity demands? Managers, government officials and often even courts conspire against them, until they cry (as one of them did) "You cannot fight the rich."

And men still are amazed at the spread of Communism in this country. Big businessmen, sadly including prominent Catholics, wave their hands, tear their hair and run all around looking for ways to stop Communism, when all the time, with a little sincerity, good will, and the true Christian spirit, they could find the answer in their very backyards—sore spots of social injustice.

As for the Catholic majority in this country, it has been in a state of coma. When supposed Catholic leaders will think nothing of wrecking legitimate unions, the only means by which the oppressed worker can fight for his right to a decent human existence, there is something deathly wrong.

The encyclicals of Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI give the cure — the social doctrines of the Church. But who will apply them? We say "The Church." But that is too vague. Who? The Hierarchy — the priests, prelates and bishops? — Yes, but in a very limited way.

Ultimately the application must be made by laymen — Catholic laymen. But most of the old Catholic laymen

in the Philippines have been suffering from a weakness that grows out of exaggerating one virtue and neglecting another. They have been suffering from too much prudence and too little fortitude. They have made of the Church a delicate and flimsy thing that must be kept out of this trouble and kept out of that fight. What a far cry from the militant organization that Christ instituted — a Church built on rock against which all the fury of hell beats in vain! How far we have strayed from the wild and furious religion which was so much in the thick of trouble that the ancient Roman emperors identified it with trouble!

The days are past when the sure place to find a Catholic was in the dungeons, and the favorite quarters of priests were torture chambers. Catholics have become too comfortable in this country. They have forgotten that Christ came with the gift of the sword and we are not called the Church militant for nothing.

The Church in this country has lost the divine recklessness of St. Francis of Assisi, of St. Thomas More, and Blessed Edmund Campion. The young Catholic student must recapture it.

Aside from recapturing the pristine vigour of Christianity, the Catholic must also change his methods. The old apologetics approach of spreading the Catholic religion will no longer work now. It is useless to argue with a man whose stomach is empty.

The first job of Catholic action is

to fight for the basic human rights — the right to three square meals a day for a man and his family, the right to home and comfort, the right to rest and recreation.

You can teach a man's children Catechism all day — but unless you do something to better the conditions under which those children will grow, your efforts are like words spoken to the winds, useless at most and at worst, the seeds of a bitter cynicism.

So to the Catholic we say what the Popes have said so often: "Go to the workingman!" but go, not with empty words, but with fruitful deeds.

Study the encyclicals—master the Catholic social doctrine. Learn the principles of trade unionism — for strong and free unions led by men of Christian principles are the strongest means for building a Christian social order.

Investigate the conditions of your fellow Filipinos who must live by their labor. No true Catholic can rest in comfort while his brothers live in squalor—(victims of injustice).

In your own homes, make sure that your servants have not degenerated into impersonal household appliances — like a dumb waiter or a vacuum cleaner. Remember that they are human like you, and must be treated as humans, with human warmth and human kindness. They, too, must eat decent food and wear decent clothing, and not left-overs and rags.

Whenever you have an opportunity to defend the workingman, do so. Do not be afraid you will soil your hands or involve the Church in a scandal. Remember — Christ was a workingman working among workmen.

WOMEN DRIVERS

A young woman learning to drive in Boclaron was proceeding along a little-used side street at a nominal speed. As an impatient motorist passed her, he shouted nastily,

"Why don't you learn to drive?"

Unabashed, she smiled sweetly and shouted back, "I am."

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THE AUDITOR COUNTS SHEEP

An auditor got out of bed one morning and complained that he had not slept a wink.

"Why didn't you count sheep?" asked his wife.

"I did and that's what got me into trouble," answered the auditor.

"I made a mistake during the first hour and it took me until I woke up this morning to correct it."