

EDITORIAL

A YEAR OF SOCIAL AWARENESS

That there are gross injustices in the present social and economic order of the world is so obvious that one would have to be utterly blind not to see them, or, worse still, callously selfish to the point of being totally uninterested in the misery of those around us. Famine joined to overproduction! One third of the world is surfeited, while the other two-thirds suffer from hunger and give signs of exhaustion and utter lack of resources. It is a fact that certain vast countries are often burdened with surpluses of cereal. The United States, Canada and Australia, to mention only a few of these countries, have far more food than they know what to do with. Without even going as far as other underdeveloped countries, we have only to look around us to see the scandalous disproportion of wealth distribution: 83% of our people barely survive, while about 1% hold in their hands the greater bulk of material blessings. This is a situation that cries out to the high heavens!

The Church has long been aware of this and has not been slow in condemning the evils and in pointing out the remedies. There were the social encyclicals, 'Rerum Novarum' of Leo XIII (1891), 'Quadragesimo Anno' of Pius XI (1931), 'Mater et Magistra' (1961) and 'Pacem in Terris' (1963) of John XXIII. Then there was the Second Vatican Council, in which there was constant reference to the problem of social justice, world peace, the political order, the underdeveloped countries. Finally, on March 26, 1967, Pope Paul VI added a precious contribution to the already long list with his encyclical 'Populorum Progressio'.

With the declaration of this present year, 1968, as the 'Year of Social Awareness' by our beloved Bishops we feel, in a more

direct way, this great pastoral concern of the Church for the socio-economic upliftment of our rural areas.

In the face of this undeniable awareness of the Church for social justice, we may perhaps be permitted to pose a question. Why have the Popes and our Pastors been calling to our minds repeatedly the social doctrines of the Church? Is it because they have not been listened to? Is it because nothing has been done? We do not think so; the social teachings of the Church have been listened to and something is being done. But the heart of the matter is, as Pope Paul says in 'Populorum Progressio', not enough has been done.

And there lies the mistake we should avoid. Within recent years, many nations regardless of race and creed, were moved to put their hopes in the Church, as the champion of social justice and peace. If our performance does not match our words, then truly we shall have failed. Our acts must never contradict our statements, or we shall have doubly sinned. **"It is not your encyclicals which we despise; what we despise is the neglect with which you yourselves treat them!"** was an indictment pronounced in another generation. Would to God that it may not be said of us in this country!

Our Pastors have seen this danger... and are leading us to its solution: work for a more just social and economic order in the light of the social teachings of the Church and work in union with all men of good-will, in order to achieve this end.

In this context we welcome and praise the declaration of this present year as the 'Year of Social Awareness'.