

Lecture I

Chapter 28

Social Catholicism and Christian Democracy

The Legacy of *Rerum Novarum* (1891) - Pope Leo XIII

The pontificate of Pius IX had cut off substantive dialogue between the official Church and modern secular culture. In sharp contrast, Leo XIII took an active approach to the problems of the modern social landscape, especially the problems of the working class. His encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) plunged the Church into midst of the social problems of the late 19th century and it became known as the Magna Carta of social Catholicism.

The stage for the issuance of *Rerum Novarum* was set by many factors. The Industrial Revolution has ushered in the age of “mass society”. Population was increasing at an unprecedented rate and the great industries of textiles, steel and coal attracted large numbers of people to the cities in England and Europe. This new industrialized mass society was characterized by horrific social conditions - lack of food, housing, clothing, medical care - created by the exploitation and oppression of factory workers.

Nearly one third of the population lived in abject poverty due to unjust wages. Women and children made up half of the labor force. Working conditions were inhuman and living conditions worse. These were the effects of liberal capitalism out of control. Labor was seen simply as a commodity to be used and abused insofar as it profited their employers.

Out of these conditions arose Social Catholicism. If the Church, through its ministers and lay leaders, was to live out its servant role to the laity, a “Catholic solution” needed to be formulated. It needed to plot a course between a system of state control proposed by socialism and the unlimited competition espoused by liberal capitalism. On the one hand, there needed to be provisions for state intervention and organized labor to control liberal capitalists and on the other hand, provisions for the protection of the right of private property to offset the near total state control proposed by the socialists.

Catholic leaders, including the clergy, did not respond quickly and by 1880 the working class in France was already lost to the Church. Socialism of the Marxist variety attracted many workers.

A different, more effective, Catholic approach began in the 1880's. Cardinal Manning of England began a movement to help alleviate the plight of workers. Manning called for the right for workers to organize, the regulation of hours of work, and an end to the horrors of child labor.

Manning also used his influence to help Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore to save the Knights of Labor from condemnation by Rome. The Knights of Labor was a largely Catholic labor union founded in 1869. Its agenda included an eight-hour working day, occupational safety regulations, the abolition of child labor and equal pay for women. It began as a secret fraternal society, but under the leadership of Terence Powderly, a Catholic and mayor of Scranton, it was reformed to escape the condemnation of bishops on the grounds of being a secret society. However, the archbishop of Quebec with the support of some conservative American bishops urged the Vatican to condemn the union in 1884. Gibbons saved the day by sending a letter to the Vatican stating that such a condemnation would be a blow to social justice and religious liberty and would possibly alienate the American workers from the Church as had happened in France.

Another sign of a growing appreciation of the “social question” was the formation of the Fribourg Union under the presidency of Msgr. Gaspar Merillod. Meeting annually, this group of social Catholic leaders called for state intervention to protect the rights of workers, separate unions for workers, recognition of the right to a living wage and insurance against sickness, accidents and unemployment.

All of the above factors, including the efforts of Gibbons, prompted Pope Leo XIII to issue *Rerum Novarum* which expressed a Catholic sociology as an alternative to both socialism and liberal capitalism. Its declarations still provide the rationale and the framework for modern Catholic social thought expressed in the encyclicals of later Popes.

The encyclical declared that the Church could and should speak out on social issues and urged lay Catholics to get involved in the struggle for social justice and reform of the social order. It held private property to be a natural right, subject to the common good, and placed the family above the state. It spoke of the obligation of employers to pay a living wage based on the view that labor is not a commodity to be bought at market prices determined by the laws of supply and demand, rather it should be determined by the human needs of the worker. It denounced “a devouring usury” and the virtual enslavement of the poor by the rich.

The obligations of workers were also mentioned. Workers are to work conscientiously, not injure the property of employers, to refrain from violence and be thrifty and prudent. While defending the rights of labor to organize to defend and promote their rights and dignity, it recommending collaboration rather than class struggle as a means of social change.

The obligations of the state were also outlined. The state must intervene to protect citizens when no other remedy is possible. The state should also protect the rights of association, religious rights and show a special concern for the poor.

The encyclical made it clear that Christians were to be involved in the redemption of the social order. Thus, papal support was given to two important movements: Catholic trade unions and Christian democratic political parties.

Early Christian trade unions were run by the clergy to provide help for needy workers. But by the 1880's Christian trade unions were run by the workers themselves, while maintaining strong ties to the Church. The Catholic Workers movement in Holland and the Young Catholic Workers in Belgium were very successful. In opposition to the Socialists, these unions stressed the need for decentralization rather than state control, employer-worker collaboration to solve problems and the cultivation of individual personality rather than subordination of the individual to the State.

These worker movement grew in size and importance. By 1920 the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions claimed 3.5 million members. After WW II growth in these unions accelerated.

The rise of Christian Democratic political parties paralleled that of the Christian trade unions. By 1945 they were the most powerful political force in Western Europe. They rejected the medieval ideas of a hierarchical society with class inequality and patronage of workers by the upper class. They encouraged workers to get involved politically and to vote in elections so that worker representatives could become officeholders and fight for the right of collective bargaining, a family living wage and decent conditions of work.

Successes of Christian Democratic parties in Belgium included universal suffrage, housing policies, old-age pensions, eight hour days and protection for the right of workers to organize. Through these successes, the Church was seen as a progressive social force and attuned to the human needs of workers.

The German Catholic Center party (1870), later known as the Christian Democratic Union attempted to work within the existing political structure. It won some important political concessions for workers: trade union protection, social insurance and factory work regulations. After WW II Protestants joined the party under the leadership of Konrad Adenauer.

The Italian Christian Democratic party (1919) failed to stop Mussolini. The Vatican did not provide support. Pius XI feared the Socialists more than the Fascists. The Pope would not allow the Christian Democrats to cooperate with the Socialists and later the Vatican was able to have their leader, Fr. Sturzo exiled from Italy. After WW II the Christian Democratic Party was resurrected, now with the support of the Catholic Church. It vied with the Communists for control of Italian politics. By 1950, Christian Democratic parties were major political factors in Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria and Italy. Less important, but still a factor, Christian Democratic parties were also active in France, Switzerland and Norway.

Catholic social teaching also found expression in Latin America, especially in Brazil under Archbishop Helder Camara who urged Catholics to move beyond charity to justice, beyond giving to the poor to attacking the social, economic and political roots of poverty. However, he warned that this was dangerous. He said, "If you speak about the poor you are a holy person; if you speak about the root causes of poverty, you are a communist." The truth of this observation was tragically highlighted when Archbishop Oscar Romero

of San Salvador took a stand for the rights of the poor and was shot to death for his efforts. In Chile, the Christian Democratic party pushed for land reform, education and other development programs for workers and peasants.

***Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) - Pope Pius XI**

The next major papal encyclical was written during the Depression when great numbers of workers were unemployed and concentrations of wealth and power were in the hands of a few. There was growing uncertainty about whether the free enterprise system held promise for the good of the workers. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, liberal capitalism, socialism, communism and fascism all competed for political/economic power.

In response to this situation, in 1931, on the fortieth anniversary of Leo's *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Pius XI issued his social encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*. This encyclical reiterated Leo's claim that the Church had a right to speak on social issues. It also upheld the right to private property as a natural right, but added that the ownership of private property could not be arbitrary or destructive, but must contribute to the common good. It was the responsibility of the state to insure that the common good was protected.

The just wage was reiterated and redefined as a family wage, which would not only allow a family to escape from poverty, but also save for the future. Again labor was not to be viewed as just one commodity among others, nor were wages to be simply the function of economic laws, e.g., supply and demand.

Socialism was rejected, but free competition must be ordered according to social justice and charity. Against the totalitarianism of socialism, Pius introduced the idea of "subsidiarity", which held that larger political entities should not absorb the function of smaller and more local ones. These smaller entities included the family, neighborhood groups, small businesses, professional associations, community organizations as well as local and state governments. However, when, and only when, smaller entities cannot cope with a social problem, the larger entity (the state) not only can, but must intervene to address the problem and restore justice.

The idea of subsidiarity was a direct criticism of the prevailing "-isms" of the times. It walked the tightrope between the extremes of the laissez-faire mentality of liberal capitalism, with little or no state intervention, and the overpowering state control found in socialism, communism and fascism.

Pius XI also called for a reconstruction of the social order based on the Gospel. This would be a social order based on charity and justice. He called for a recognition of individual human rights and that these rights should be safeguarded by institutions, social structures and law based on "social justice".

Pope Pius XII - Private Property (1941)

Pope Pius XII (1939-58) wrote no major social encyclical. However, in various public addresses he clarified the Church's concept of private property and its social purposes. Like Leo XIII and Pius XI, Pius XII insisted on the right and importance of private ownership of property.

He offset this individual right by asserting the first priority of the general right of all people to use the goods of the earth. He stressed that the right of an individual to a particular item of private property (e.g., land) is a means for carrying out, and subordinate to, the general right of all people to use and benefit from property. Individuals do not have an absolute right to the ownership and use of private property. This ownership and use is always subordinate to the common good. (Radio address of June 1, 1941, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*)

Using this principal many Catholic bishops in South America criticized the situation where the vast majority of the land was owned by a tiny minority of the rich. Social justice called for narrowing the gap between the very rich and the very poor. Land reform was suggested as part of the answer. This harkened back to the Old Testament idea that the land belonged to God and that we are only stewards -- stewards who must use the land justly in relation to our fellow human beings. This idea is expressed in the OT notion of the Jubilee Year (see Leviticus 25:10; 25:23-28; 25:35-41). These laws addressed the inequities that inevitably arise when land changes hands for whatever reasons -- sale, confiscation for debts, foreclosure on loans, etc..

Pope John XXIII - *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963)

Pope John XXIII celebrated the seventieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* with his own social encyclical - *Mater et Magistra*. He summarized and endorsed the social principles of Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII contained in their social encyclicals.

In this encyclical the pope called for a balance between rugged individualism and socialism. He called for the state to intervene to balance individual and group freedoms. Some saw this as an attack on the notion of subsidiarity and a partial endorsement of socialism which had long been criticized by popes before him. However, he confirmed the right to private property, but observed that individual property holders did not, in fact, effectively subordinate their use of private property to the common good. In fact, he stated that some individuals had invoked the Church's affirmation of private property to support efforts against social justice. Furthermore, many social problems were unable to be solved effectively except at the federal level, e.g., health care and civil rights.

Pope John put state intervention on a par with individual responsibility in guaranteeing the responsible use of private property. Without state intervention he foresaw civil disorder and the exploitation of the weak by the unscrupulous strong. Many conservatives, including conservative Catholics (William Buckley), reacted negatively to the encyclical.

In 1963, Pope John XXIII wrote as second encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*. It was written

within the context of the cold war and the arms race. It was addressed to “all people of good will” and as common ground for ethical discussions he used reason and the natural law to define the rights and duties of individuals, public authorities and the world community.

He supported the need for a world-wide authority - the United Nations. He spoke of individual rights - opportunity to work without coercion, a just wage, the right to hold private property and a share in productive goods for workers.

He spoke also of the “right to life”, a right which included adequate food, clothing shelter, rest, medical care, necessary social services and, in the case of sickness, inability to work, widowhood or unemployment, some form of “security” which the state might rightly provide when necessary.

He condemned the arms race. Finally, he warned that there can be no peace without justice.

Pope Paul VI - *Populorum Progressio* -The Development of Peoples (1976)

Following the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI wrote his social encyclical at a time when the social focus of the Church was shifting from rich and poor individuals to rich and poor nations. In the U.S. President Johnson had declared a War on Poverty and had launched the Great Society. Medicare had begun in 1966. The U.S. was deeply involved in Vietnam and the civil rights movement was in full swing.

Paul VI listed three causes for the imbalance between rich and poor nations: 1) the legacy of colonialism, 2) the neocolonial situation of international economic domination of poor countries by the rich and 3) the stark imbalance of power among nations.

He challenged the injustice of “so-called free trade”. He did not condemn the idea of a competitive marketplace, but called for a just economic system built not on the principles of liberal capitalism, but upon solidarity between rich and poor, dialogue and universal charity.

He stressed that true development is not only economic, but must include the whole person and every person in the task of self-fulfillment and personal responsibility. He developed the concept of “solidarity” that links the individual and nations with concerns of the poor.

He called for Christians to work for justice so that all people can become “artisans of their destiny”. He called for an end to nationalism, racism and the arms race.

Catholic social teaching before Vatican II can be summarized as follows:

- the right of the Church to speak on social issues.
- a critique of socialism, communism, fascism and liberal capitalism
- affirmation of the right of private property, but limited in light of its social function.
- attention to the causes of poverty - a movement beyond charity to justice.
- the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively.
- an awareness of oppressive social structures that perpetuate exploitation.
- the use of the principle of subsidiarity, but that failing, then government intervention for justice.
- a call for Catholics to become engaged in social action.
- a call for Catholics to support international agencies working for social justice and peace.
- a call for the end of the arms race and the banning of nuclear arms.
- a judgment that democracy is the form of government best suited to guarantee human rights.
- a concern not just for poor individuals, but also for poor nations.
- there can be no peace without justice.

Since 1967 there have been five additional papal encyclical on social issues, one from the Synod of Bishops gathered in Rome and two Pastoral Letters from the American bishops.

The genius of the Catholic social tradition is that it proceeds from the bottom up, rather than from the top down. In other words, the Church does not start with a particular “ism” - capitalism, communism, fascism, or socialism - and then seek ways to impose this “ism” on the public order. Rather, it begins from the bottom up, that is, from the injustices found in the current public order and then tries to solve them by implementing solutions based on human rights. Whatever political/economic social order that is grounded in these human rights and thus promotes the flourishing of individuals and advances the common good is acceptable.

There is always a realization that neither the Kingdom of God nor some secular Utopia is possible in our present world - all human systems will remain imperfect. However, there is a mandate to work toward such an order in making the Kingdom of God present, albeit in the form of a “mustard seed”. Ultimately, the Kingdom of full justice and peace will only be possible by the power of God in some undetermined future date.

Chapter 29

The Modernist Debacle

Modernism is a movement that developed within the Catholic Church in the late 19th century. The term “Modernist” was coined to label a variety of liberal philosophers, biblical scholars and even a novelists who were attempting to present Catholicism to the then “modern” culture. This culture included advances in the sciences of biology and geology, historical and biblical research and a variety of new philosophical schools.

It is interesting to note that Protestant denominations faced the same problems and had some of the same difficulties solving them. Reacting to “modern culture” Protestants tended to break into two groups -- “fundamentalists” and “modernist”. Fundamentalists stuck to a non-critical, literal interpretation of Scripture and any modern developments in science or elsewhere that seemed at variance with their interpretation of Scripture were labeled erroneous and evil, e.g., evolution. The modernist school, in an attempt to adapt to modern science, tended to dispense with religious doctrine in favor of sentiment and ethical conduct.

Authority figures in the Catholic Church took a position somewhat like the Protestant “fundamentalists”, while the Catholic modernists attempted to reinterpret doctrine rather than to dispense with it. History has rightly judged that the modernists often started with partial truths and expanded them into a system of thought that was radically flawed. However, they were working on the right issues and asking the right questions. The official reaction to their efforts was no less radical, plus the official Church failed to deal with the right issues or ask the right questions. Pope Pius X (1903-14) in encyclical, *Pascendi*, simply categorized the movement as “the synthesis of all the heresies”. Such strong negative reaction retarded needed progress in Catholic theology well into the 20th century.

Background

We have seen that in the time of Pius IX (1846-58) the Church had also reacted strongly to liberal Catholics as evidenced the “Syllabus of Errors” and the actions of the First Vatican Council. By the time Leo XIII became pope, the Church had taken a defensive attitude toward the main cultural and political movements of the day and liberal Catholic thinkers had been suppressed.

Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) took a somewhat different approach. He recognized the challenges presented by Darwinism, Marxism and the historical approach to the Bible and development in the Church. He accepted the challenge to integrate the truths contained in these modern movements, while retaining a fidelity to the Gospel and traditional Catholic teachings. While a conservative at heart, Leo spoke of an openness to modern culture, gave a nod to the idea of development of doctrine by appointing John Henry Newman a cardinal, issued his liberal social encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, opened the Vatican archives to historians and urged the French to accept their new republic. He also encouraged the study of science, current sociopolitical processes and philosophy.

Thus liberal Catholic thinkers felt that they had somewhat of a “green light” to proceed in their efforts to reconcile Catholic thought with modern culture. However, they found that they faced determined opposition. Neo-Scholasticism, which endorsed the thought of St. Thomas, had been firmly implanted in the Catholic universities with the endorsement of Leo XIII.

Neo-Scholasticism was characterized by a medieval mentality which was hostile to modern science, ignorant of modern historical and critical approaches to Scripture, used argumentation based primarily on logic and the appeal to authority, defended traditional theological formulations, dismissed modern philosophy and promoted an attitude of absolute obedience to Church authority. To say the least, liberal Catholics had misinterpreted what they saw as a “green light” to proceed. But proceed they did and thus initiated what history has called the Modernist Crisis.

Foundations and Teachers

A primary focus of controversial studies was modern critical approach to Scripture. For example, the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis held that Moses was not the author of the first five books of the Bible as was traditionally held, but that the Pentateuch was a combination of several traditions dating from diverse times. This hypothesis was based on critical studies of the Scripture which also stressed the human, culturally conditioned and developmental side of Scripture. It was able to explain the difference between “literal” biblical assertions and emerging scientific facts in a way that seemed to challenge the traditional conservative understanding of the inerrancy of Scripture, e.g., the creation and age of the universe.

This modern approach to the Scriptures and also the works of modern philosophers were studied and adapted by modernist scholars in an attempt to reconstruct Catholic teaching based on the insights provided by these new academic disciplines. We shall briefly describe the efforts of a few of these thinkers.

Alfred Loisy (1857-1940)

Based on the historical-critical approach to Scripture, Alfred Loisy, (priest, biblical scholar and linguist) taught that the Bible should be interpreted as any other historical document, rather than as a privileged expression of faith. Using the historical-critical method, he concluded that Pentateuch was not written by Moses, Genesis was not a scientific account of creation and that there was a true development of doctrine in Scripture. These ideas provoked a response from Leo XIII in the form of an encyclical, *Providentissimus Deus* (1893), which ruled out error in the Bible and referred scholars to the Fathers and St. Thomas.

However, Loisy continued his studies and in 1903 he published his book “The Gospel and the Church.” This work called for Jesus to be understood in terms other than those of the Council of Chalcedon - one person (divine), two natures (human and divine). Rather, Jesus should be seen as only a prophet with a unique consciousness of being the Messiah.

Jesus' message was that the kingdom of God was imminent and so He did not intend to found a Church. When the kingdom did not arrive, it was then the Church, including its structures and sacraments, "naturally" developed. He explained the historical form that Christianity took using the concept of "vitality", which meant that the necessities of life dictated the true forms of true religion. In addition, he spoke of dogmas not as unchanging truths, but as summarized religious experience. He denied that dogmas have any correspondence with the realities that they attempt to express.

The publication of Loisy's book caused a furor. It was condemned by the archbishop of Paris and was placed on the *Index of Forbidden Books*. He broke with the Catholic Church in 1907 and was excommunicated in 1908. He is considered by some historians to be the "founder" of Modernism.

Maurice Blondel (1861-1949)

In the field of philosophy, Maurice Blondel proposed a non-Scholastic philosophy of immanence. He developed a "bottom up" theology that did not begin with objective, supernatural revealed truths, but began with the subjective religious needs of human beings in order to show that humans, by their very nature were open to and needed the supernatural. He was attempting a theology of grace that would relate supernatural grace to everyday life. Such an approach to grace would aid in the commitment by Leo XIII and later popes to involve Christians in political and social life as a response to the Gospel and God's grace.

George Tyrrell (1861-1909)

Tyrrell was an English Jesuit theologian who was an outspoken critic of neo-Scholasticism. He wrote on the development of doctrine, the nature of the Church and the importance of religious experience. For Tyrrell Jesus was the supreme manifestation of God and this personal experience of God could not be identified with dogmatic propositions. Dogmatic propositions were merely an attempt to formulate the experience of God in the thought patterns of a certain culture.

Tyrrell reacted to what he considered the misuse of authority in manner of Pius X's reaction to the modernists scholars. Tyrrell wanted a more democratic Church, with authority figures transmitting a community consensus. Infallibility, for Tyrrell, was granted to the Church, not any one person in the Church. The Church could not fundamentally err, even though mistakes could be made along the way.

Tyrrell was expelled from the Jesuits and excommunicated in 1907. He received he last rites, but was denied Catholic burial.

Official Reaction

Official reaction was quite naturally based on an assessment of the errors being posited by this loose collection of the Catholic thinkers. First, in 1906 the Biblical Commission, among other things, affirmed that Moses indeed was the author of the entire Pentateuch.

Secondly, the errors of the modernists were summed up in two documents: The decree *Lamentabili* issued by the Holy Office (formally the Inquisition) in July of 1907 and Pius X's Encyclical *Pascendi* issued in September of the same year.

Lamentabili condemned a list of 65 errors taken mostly from the works of Loisy and Tyrrell, although they were not named in the document. The errors identified included positions that the knowledge of Jesus was limited and thus He was not always aware that He was the Messiah; Jesus did not directly institute the Church or the sacraments; the resurrection was not an event in the historical order and that papal primacy was not of divine origin. Finally, and most importantly was the condemnation of idea that Christianity must become non-dogmatic if it is to be reconciled with true science.

The Encyclical *Pascendi* attempted a summation of modernist errors in four categories:

(1) Agnosticism - this asserts that supernatural truths cannot be known with certainty by human reason. Religious truth is a subjective experience.

(2) Immanentism - holds that Scripture and Tradition do not contain revelation, but are an expression of inner feelings of religious persons. Religious experience begins with an inner religious need. Dogmas that do not evoke such religious experiences are not necessary for salvation.

(3) Evolutionism - the Church is the result of a gradual evolution. The Church, doctrine and worship must continue to evolve to adapt to changing times. (4) Symbolism - dogmas and sacraments are objectifications of human subjective religious needs.

These summaries do not reflect any one scholar's views, but they hit the main points of the modernist agenda. However, the documents were harsh and imputed ill will, evil motives and bad faith on the part of the scholars involved. A harsh and unfair judgment.

The methods of repression were also harsh and unfair and harkened back to the Inquisition. These methods included the establishment of vigilance committees in every diocese to detect any signs of modernism, diocesan censors, operating in secrecy, to watch over literature connected with the Church, strict Thomism to be taught in seminaries and all priests and teacher were required to take an oath against Modernism.

A veritable reign of terror was set up in the Church which included a secret society (*Sodalitium Pianum*) complete with a network of spies and a secret communications code. They targeted anyone who was suspected of a lukewarm attitude toward Scholasticism, favored Christian democracy or ecumenism. They created a black list and assaulted suspects in Catholic publications without consultation or the possibility of defense. It was not until 1919, under Benedict XV that such excesses were halted.

Modernism was stamped out, but at a high cost. Catholic biblical, theological and philosophical studies were put on hold till the middle of the 20th century. Seminaries reverted to medieval intellectual ghettos until the middle of the 20th century. There was no

attempt to sift out the valuable insights of the modernists and incorporate them into Catholic thought. This finally did happen, but not until after Vatican II.

There is blame enough to go around on both sides. But in all, the modernist crisis was a severe blow to the Catholic Church. We are finally catching up.

Interestingly enough, while the errors of the modernists have been refuted, many of the assertions of the modernist thinkers - Moses did not write the Pentateuch, the Genesis creation accounts are not science - are now common assertions by scholars and popes.