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THE ROAD OF CHARITY LEADS
TO THE PICKET LINES:
THE NEO-THOMISTIC REVIVAL AND THE
ITALIAN CATHOLIC LABOR MOVEMENT

One of the most important aspects of late nineteenth century European intellectual life was the revival of Thomism, which enveloped the philosophical, social and political outlooks of Catholics. The great influence of the Neo-Thomistic intellectual current appears somewhat enigmatic in view of recent criticism of the methods and substantive propositions employed by turn of the century Thomistic philosophers. The very word “philosopher” might in fact be justifiably denied to many of these Neo-Thomists, since they seem to have forgotten too often that philosophy means asking questions. It is rare to see in their works a creative application of Thomistic ideas to the modern world. Instead, they attempted to fit modern society into a rigid, dogmatic framework of Thomistic principles. And if these principles turned out to be straightjackets, neither philosophy nor Aquinas, but only the Neo-Thomists are to blame. For Aquinas’ philosophy, as Etienne Gilson and Ralph M. McInerny have recently pointed out,¹ was an extremely creative adaptation of Aristotle’s thought to medieval intellectual, social and political conditions, as well as to the principles of Christianity. Aquinas’ method of continuous questioning stood in contrast to the dogmatism of most of his self-proclaimed disciples in modern times.

Yet it is unfair to inculcate only scholars for the shortcomings of modern Thomism, and to lavish praise, as Gilson did, on the Neo-Thomistic initiatives of the leaders of the Catholic Church. In so doing Gilson seems to have overlooked the fact that it was the Church that made the thought of Aquinas a philosophy *ex decreto*, and rigidified the principles of Thomist theology into “theses” whose unquestioned acceptance was expected from all Catholics.² Neo-Thomistic scholars who attempted to force the modern social world into a straightjacket

¹ Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Thomism* (New York, 1966), pp. 84-102; Ralph M. McInerny, *Thomism in the Age of Renewal* (Garden City, 1966), *passim*.

² For examples see *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, VI (1914), pp. 336-41, 383-86.

of dogmatic Thomistic principles were following the leads of papal doctrinal statements. And because these papal teachings often took the form of encyclicals, a weighty form of expression for Catholics, the burden of an uncreative Thomism came to rest on the consciences and intellectual outlooks of a generation of Catholics all over the world, but especially in Italy. A study of the directives and practices of Pius X (1903-1914), one of the Thomist popes, leaves one with doubts about the positive contributions Gilson and McInerny claimed for papal Thomism, and leads one to suspect that the ossification and sterile orthodoxy of Neo-Thomism did not come in spite of the intentions of the leaders of the Church, as Gilson and McInerny suggested, but because of them.

Pope Pius X insisted, for instance, that the "poor" were to remain a permanent element on the social landscape. Behind his insistence was the Neo-Thomistic principle of *caritas*, mutual love and responsibility, which was to create a symbiotic relationship between various social strata, and thus a unity of the faithful. The Church's opposition to such manifestations of "class struggle" as strikes was also rooted in the principle of *caritas*. And the concept of the paternalistic "tutelage" by the "superior" classes of the interests of the working classes was also derived from the Neo-Thomistic notions of *caritas* and the "social function" of property.

Because he upheld as valid for modern society norms and organizational forms that were rooted in a vision of the medieval world reflected in the philosophy of Aquinas, the Pope's Thomism became responsible for frustrating the Italian Catholics' attempts to organize labor. The "mixed" union, for which Pius X showed a marked preference during the first years of his papacy, was an application of the principle of "tutelage": the union was to include both capitalists and proletarians, united by the golden chain of Thomistic *caritas*. But Catholic labor organizers were to find that the "mixed" union was not a working proposition for the simple reason that the workers did not want it. Repulsed by the idea of the "tutelage" of their interests by the "superior" classes, Italian workers insisted on taking their fate into their own hands. And during the first decade of the twentieth century Italy experienced a massive wave of strikes as the workers pressed for their share in the material progress of the country.

Catholic labor organizers, inevitably involved in these strikes, were caught in a conflict between ideals and reality. Thus during the papacy of Pius X there developed a confrontation between the aged leader of the Church – the custodian of Catholic ideals – and the young Catholic activists, who were charged by the Pope with putting these ideals into practice. This essay attempts to present the most salient aspects of

the conflict between Neo-Thomistic Catholic ideals and the realities of Italian society at the turn of the century, the changes in the official social doctrine of the Church that came in response to the pressure of reality, and the waning of the influence of Thomism that coincided with these changes.

The Neo-Thomistic revival was reaching its apogee during the 1880's, when Giuseppe Sarto, the future Pope Pius X, was gaining admission to the highest reaches of the Church hierarchy.¹ In 1879 *Aeterni Patris*, an encyclical by Leo XIII, confirmed Aquinas' philosophy as an indispensable part of Catholic doctrine. And a year later papal instructions made the works of Aquinas part of the curriculum of Catholic seminaries. Thus Thomistic philosophy became decisive in shaping the intellectual outlook of Italian priests. Their pastoral activities, in turn, were to give Thomistic notions a degree of popularity among Catholic laymen. This development explains the consistent references to Thomistic ideas in the turn of the century Italian Catholic thought. While Catholic writers were directed to the philosophy of Aquinas by so important a doctrinal statement as a papal encyclical, their readers came to be prepared by their pastors to receive and understand notions that grew out of Thomism.

But Catholic priests studied the *Summa Theologica* well before papal instructions made its reading obligatory. Biographers of Pope Pius X tell how, as a young seminarian during the middle of the nineteenth century, he moved with awe through the halls of the "mystical and intellectual cathedral built by centuries of Catholic theology", how he absorbed the *Summa* of Aquinas. They quote the praise his professor lavished on young Sarto's "extensive and rare knowledge of the facts of medieval history and their chronological order".²

The attention paid by Sarto's instructors to medieval history and Aquinas is a sign of the special importance Thomism gained after the Revolution of 1789. During the Restoration Neo-Thomism became a refuge for the leaders of the Church who rejected the Revolution and the intellectual and social changes it introduced. They counterposed the philosophy of Aquinas to the ideology of the Revolution.³ The

¹ Bishop Sarto's first address to his diocese typically refers to the importance of Thomistic philosophy. See his *Prima lettera pastorale* (Treviso, 1885), p. 27.

² Igino Giordani, *Pio X, un prete di campagna* (Turin, 1951), pp. 13-14; Angelo Marchesan, *Papa Pio X nella sua vita e nella sua parola* (Rome, 1905), p. 87. Marchesan's volume is probably the only "authorized" biography of the Pope: it was written by his secretary. Pius X read and "corrected" the first draft.

³ The remark of De Maistre about Romantic philosophy applies to the Neo-

vision of medieval society in the works of the Angelic Doctor was upheld as the corrective for the conditions of modern society. Aquinas' ideas were pitted against the ideologues of bourgeois liberalism, particularly Hegel, whose thought reflected the new social, political and intellectual conditions created by the Revolution.

Italian Neo-Thomism found its identity in a struggle against Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852), the most important representative of Hegelianism in mid-nineteenth century Italy.¹ The marked political and social orientation of Giobertian philosophy forced a similar emphasis upon contemporary Thomists. And the Leonine generation of Neo-Thomists carried on the earlier practice of applying Aquinas' philosophy to the social and political problems of the day. The encyclical *Aeterni Patris* was part of this trend: from considerations of pure philosophy, pointing to the "primitive splendor" of the Thomistic system, the encyclical moved on to social and political arguments in favor of a Thomistic revival.

Aeterni Patris stated that because it admirably harmonized faith and reason, the philosophy of Aquinas would prepare Catholics for the defense of their faith against those who opposed the dogmas of religion in the name of reason. But for the Pope the importance of Thomistic philosophy obviously went beyond the defense of the principles of the Catholic religion, for he added that Thomism was also useful in combatting "perverse" modern doctrines. "Aquinas explains", Leo XIII wrote,

"the real nature of liberty that nowadays turns into license, the Divine origin of authority, the laws and their validity, the paternal and just reign of princes, the obedience due to the highest authorities, the mutual charity among men; these and other similar doctrines are a very great and invincible force in combatting the new principles of rights which endanger the tranquillity of the social and political order."²

Thomistic current as well: "Nous ne voulons pas la contre-révolution mais le contraire de la révolution." Quoted in Karl Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology* (New York, 1953), p. 80.

¹ For some of the most significant historiographical reflections on Italian Neo-Thomism see Benedetto Croce, "I neo in filosofia", in: *La Critica*, XXXIX (1941), pp. 289-95; Giovanni Gentile, "Neotomisti", in *Opera Omnia* (Florence, 1957), XXXIII, passim; Amato Masnovo, "Il prof. G. Gentile e il Tomismo italiano dal 1850 al 1900", in: *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica*, IV (1912), pp. 115-25, 260-69, 646-49; Masnovo, "Il neotomismo in Italia dopo il 1870", *ibid.*, XVI (1924), pp. 97-108; Masnovo, "Il significato storico del neotomismo", *ibid.*, XXXII (1940), pp. 17-30.

² Leo XIII, encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (Rome, 1927), pp. 61-63.

The social ideas of Leo's successor, Pius X, were also rooted in Aquinas' philosophy. The new pope's philosophical outlook, like that of all high churchmen at the turn of the century, rested on the foundations of Thomistic theology. And to Aquinas no social concept was of greater importance than *caritas*, Christian love. "The queen of all virtues"¹ according to Leo XIII, charity was for Aquinas man's way of sharing the essence of God, His very nature, which is love. Charity was the bond that united man with God. It also united man with his fellow men. For Aquinas *caritas* was the bond that made society a unit; it was the lifeblood of the social body, an indispensable means of social solidarity.²

Thomistic theology distinguished between spiritual and corporeal expressions of charity. Spiritual forms, such as making an erring brother aware of his sins, were considered more important than corporeal charity, such as giving alms, but Aquinas stressed the need for both forms of charity in the virtuous Christian life.³ The giving of alms was thus an indispensable part of Christian life: those Catholics who systematically avoided helping the "poor" with alms committed a grave sin.⁴ By creating a system of mutual dependence among different social strata, charity and alms became vital in establishing unity among the faithful. For the "poor" depended upon alms for their physical survival, while the very existence of the "rich" as Christians, and their salvation, was conditioned by their providing the "poor" with at least the prime necessities of life. This symbiosis that united the "rich" and the "poor" within the fold came to be seen by the leaders of the Church as an essential condition for a Christian

¹ Leo XIII, encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, in: Iginio Giordani (ed.), *Le encicliche sociali dei papi da Pio IX a Pio XII* (Rome, 1956), p. 209.

² Aquinas, *Summa*, I/II, q. 66, and II/II, qq. 23-27; Leo XIII, encyclical *Graves de Communi*, in: *Le encicliche sociali dei papi*, p. 232; *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 13 and 17, 1905; Alfonso Capecehatro, *Amiamo il popolo* (Rome, 1912), pp. 5-6; Giacomo Radini Tedeschi, *Discorso tenuto nell'adunanza generale della Società di S. Vincenzo di Paoli* (Piacenza, 1890), pp. 3-4; Julien Fontaine, *Le modernisme sociologique: décadence ou régénération?* (Paris, 1909), p. 468. Arguments presented by Fontaine will frequently reappear in this essay: his volume was apparently read by Pius X, who praised the author for his "profound theological and social understanding". The papal letter to Fontaine, signed by Cardinal Merry del Val, the papal Secretary of State, is in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, I (1909), p. 719.

³ Aquinas, *Summa*, II/II, qq. 31-33.

⁴ Raimondo Spiazzi, "Il trattato teologico della carità", in: Spiazzi et al., *Teologia e storia della carità* (Rome, 1965), p. 178. This, as well as two other essays in the volume, Tullio Goffi, "La carità e l'elemosina", and Carlo Messori, "La carità e la pubblica assistenza", were helpful for my initial understanding of the problems involved in the theological principle of *caritas*.

community, and hence indispensable for institutional survival.¹

The notion of charity as an instrument of social solidarity was supported in Catholic theology by another Thomistic concept, that of the “social function” of property. Through this, the Neo-Thomists reaffirmed the traditional Christian principle of ownership as stewardship, implying that the bounty of earth was given by God to the whole of mankind, and that property in a sense belonged to the community. Consequently all men had a right to the basic necessities of life.² Aquinas, and Catholic theology following him, developed the theme of the “social function of property” through the concept of “superfluous” wealth destined to be given to the “poor” by their “rich” brothers.³ It recognized a threefold division among man’s earthly possessions: there were goods necessary for one’s physical survival, those necessary for properly maintaining one’s social status, and the “superfluous”. A fellow man’s “extreme” material need, his lack of the bare necessities of life, obligated Catholics to share with him all their possessions but the ones necessary for their own physical survival. And the “common” need of a fellow citizen justified a share of the “superfluous” wealth of the rich.⁴

¹ My presentation of this relationship as a symbiosis originated in a discussion not related to the era of Pius X in Carl Schorske, “The Idea of the City in European Thought”, in: Schorske et al., *The Historian and the City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 95-114. See also Dal-Gal (ed.), *Insegnamenti di San Pio X* (Bari, 1957), pp. 73-76; Pius X, encyclical *E Supremi Apostolatus*, in: *Civiltà Cattolica*, Eighteenth Series, XII (1903), pp. 144ff.; encyclical *Il Fermo Proposito*, in: *Le encicliche sociali dei papi*, pp. 241, 248; Stanislao Medolago Albani, *Le classi dirigenti nella società* (Bergamo, 1883), passim.

² Pius X, encyclical *E Supremi Apostolatus*, loc. cit., p. 147; *motu proprio Fin dalla prima*, in: *Civiltà Cattolica*, LV (1904), I, p. 5; *L’Osservatore Romano*, April 18, 1912; Radini Tedeschi, *Discorso tenuto*, p. 6; Eugenio Di Carlo, *La filosofia giuridica e politica di San Tommaso d’Aquino* (Palermo, 1945), p. 105; Francesco Olgiati, “La politica di S. Pio X e il conservatorismo”, in: *Vita e Pensiero*, XXXVII (1954), pp. 531ff.

³ Aquinas, *Summa*, II/II, q. 32. Another parallel Thomistic concept is that of the productive and socially useful development of the wealth one possesses. See Francesco Vito, “Trasformazioni economiche e dottrina sociale cattolica”, in: Vito (ed.), *I nuovi termini della questione sociale e l’enciclica Mater et Magistra* (Milan, 1962), p. 28.

⁴ Aquinas, *Summa*, II/II, qq. 31-32; Giulio Monetti, *Problemi varii di sociologia generale* (Bergamo, 1913), II, p. 118. Arguments presented by Monetti will frequently appear in this essay. Their special importance for the study of official Catholic social doctrine lies not only in the fact that Monetti was the instructor of sociology at the Scuola Sociale of Bergamo, a kind of Catholic university, training the cadre of Catholic Action. We also have the evidence of a papal letter showing that Pius X, who read Monetti’s volumes, found them “doctrinally sound and of indispensable utility” (*Azione Sociale*, November 1913, pp. 197-98; the *Azione Sociale* was a monthly published by the Unione Economi-

The relationship of mutual dependence between “rich” and “poor” reinforced in Catholic sociology the traditional notion of society as an organic unit. The Church had always been called a “mystical body”. From this it was easy to slide into an image of society as a “body”.¹ Since it stressed the indispensability of all the members, the dependence of the whole on the parts, the organic analogy *per se* was not hierarchical; in fact, it had a pull toward equalitarianism. But Catholic sociologists at the turn of the century tended to disregard the implications of equalitarianism in the organic analogy.² It was more consistent with the hierarchical notions traditional in Catholic theology to argue that certain groups performed functions of a higher order than other organs of the social body. This conviction found expression in the language used by Catholic sociologists, like Giuseppe Toniolo, who consistently spoke of “superior” and “inferior” classes within society.³

Those who affirmed an innate inequality in society did so with the support of the highest authority of the Church. Soon after his assumption of the papacy Pius X went on record stating that God in His infinite wisdom had created society

“composed of unequal elements, as the members of the human body are unequal. To make them equal would be impossible, and would amount to the destruction of society itself. [...] It is the wish of God that there be princes and subjects, capitalists [*padroni*] and proletarians, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, nobles and plebeians, who united by the tie of love, are to aid each other to reach their final destination in Heaven, and here on earth, their material and moral well-being.”⁴

Of the two basic social groups identified by Catholic social thought, the socially “inferior” were the working classes employed in agriculture and industry. In Catholic sociological literature, the terms “people”,

co-Sociale, the organization that coordinated Catholic social action, including labor unions).

¹ Leo XIII, encyclical *Graves de Communi*, loc. cit., p. 228. For a detailed discussion of the organic analogy in Leo’s encyclicals see Richard L. Camp, *The Papal Ideology of Social Reform* (Leyden, 1968), pp. 29ff.; Giacomo Radini Tedeschi, *San Giorgio M. e la questione operaia* (Genoa, 1890), p. 7; Fontaine, *Le modernisme sociologique*, pp. 139ff.

² Aquinas’ treatment of “justice” in *Summa*, II/II, qq. 58 and 61, may have given the lead: it stressed the social dependence of the parts on the whole.

³ For examples see Giuseppe Toniolo, “L’Unione cattolica per gli studi sociali”, first published in 1893, reprinted in *Opera Omnia* (Vatican City, 1951), Fourth Series, III, p. 75; Toniolo, *Lettere* (Vatican City, 1953), III, pp. 220, 305.

⁴ Pius X, *motu proprio Fin dalla Prima*, loc. cit., pp. 4-5.

“inferior classes”, and “poor” became interchangeable, just as the words “superior classes” and “rich” were.¹

The identification of the “poor” with the “inferior classes”, with the “people”, characterized the outlook of self-styled Thomists, like Toniolo, the major Catholic sociologist of the era, whose theoretical works contributed substantially to the social doctrine of the Church. The future Pope Pius X, then Cardinal Sarto, warmly approved his argument when Toniolo announced during the 1890’s that the “elevation” of the “inferior” classes could not be entrusted to the people alone. The “elevation” of the people did “not come from below only, but also from above: precisely from the hierarchy that is instituted immediately and positively by God”. The “inferior” classes, Toniolo argued, could take care of their own problems only in exceptional cases. Their “salvation” was to come through the “superior” classes which had “the natural historical mandate for the initiatives and the normal direction of civic life”.²

The “tutelage” of the interests of the “inferior” social stratum by the “superior” classes remained the keynote of Catholic social action after Cardinal Sarto became Pope Pius X. He followed the Leonine tradition in sending Catholic activists “to the people” and urging them to “study” how they can “dry up the [people’s] tears, sweeten their suffering and better their material conditions”. He reconfirmed the importance of the diligent use of “superfluous” wealth in Christian life. But like his predecessor, he also emphasized that the problems of the “inferior” classes were primarily religious and moral, and not material ones.³ Catholic publications, in turn, faithfully followed the arguments of Pius X. *L’Osservatore Romano*, for instance, pointed out that Catholic activists cannot approach the people “with empty hands, but [they] do not have to go with hands exuberantly and exclusively full of earthly goods and material advantages.” The “moderation of the [people’s] intemperance” and the mitigation of their “excesses” was also the task of Catholic activists. A handbill of the *Unione Popolare* – the organization directing Catholic propaganda – became

¹ F. F. Chiesa, *L’Unione Popolare spiegata ai contadini* (Alba, 1908), p. 9; Capecelatro, *Amiamo il popolo*, p. 3; *Azione Sociale*, January 1907, p. 108; August 1908, p. 482.

² Pius X, *Lettere raccolte da Nello Vian* (Rome, 1954), pp. 259-60; Gabriele De Rosa, *Storia del movimento cattolico in Italia* (Bari, 1966), pp. 336ff.; P. Pratesi, “Luci e ombre nella sociologia di Toniolo”, in: *Rassegna di politica e di storia*, I (1955), passim; Paolo Emilio Taviani, “Il concetto di democrazia cristiana in Giuseppe Toniolo”, in: *Civitas*, New Series, VI (1955), passim.

³ Leo XIII, encyclical *Graves de Communi*, loc. cit., p. 235; Pius X, encyclical *E Supremi Apostolatus*, loc. cit., p. 146; encyclical *Il Fermo Proposito*, loc. cit., p. 245; encyclical *Iucunda Sane*, in: *Civiltà Cattolica*, LV (1904), II, p. 22.

still more specific about the “tutelage” of “people”: it warned the “rich” to

“teach them Christian resignation, teach them the love of work, teach them the love of saving, help them in their need. Speak to them [...] of their duties toward themselves, their families, their companions, their neighbours, toward God.”¹

This very low estimate of the “people” – they obviously had to be taught even about their duties toward themselves – was typical of many Catholic writers. Some of them, like Salvatore Talamo, one of the major Thomist scholars of the era, pointed out how Christianity honored manual work, how through the example of the Son of the Carpenter, the Church ennobled the role of the workingman. Yet these arguments remained empty rhetoric and some Catholics were rather slow in extending this honor to the workers who were their own contemporaries. Even Toniolo, who sincerely believed that the “elevation” of the “people” to “major participation in the benefits of civilization” was the aim of Catholic Action, consistently betrayed a low estimate of the workingman. For him, the “people” were an impassive, grey mass, the object of the exploitive action of the upper classes, waiting for their social superiors to “descend” to them and “conquer” them for the Church.²

Such an attitude toward the working classes explains why the idea of labor unions was slow in gaining acceptance among Catholic conservatives, in spite of the explicit recognition of unions in *Rerum Novarum*, the “labor encyclical” of Leo XIII. In 1901, a decade after *Rerum Novarum* was issued, and just two years before his election to the papal throne, Cardinal Sarto, then the Patriarch of Venice, appeared in person – “with the permission of the Director”, his biographer added – at a local industrial plant which had become the target of a unionizing attempt by a nationwide organization of labor. The Cardinal urged the workers to stay out of the union and rely instead on him, their Patriarch, who was always “ready to protect [*tutelare*] their interests”.³ That the workers might “protect” their own interests was obviously outside the range of Cardinal Sarto’s thought: how could

¹ L’Osservatore Romano, April 6, 1910; Allarme! (handbill of the Unione Popolare, the organization directing Italian Catholic propaganda), No 31 (1910); Azione Sociale, June 1909, pp. 145ff.

² Salvatore Talamo, *Il cristianesimo e il lavoro manuale* (Rome, n.d.), pp. 6ff.; Toniolo, *Lettere*, III, pp. 61, 97, 147-48.

³ The episode is told in the “authorized” biography of Pius X: Marchesan, *Papa Pio X*, p. 404.

they, “inferior” as they were, and in need of the “tutelage” of their social superiors.

The existence of labor unions implied a degree of autonomy for the working classes, and freedom from the Neo-Thomistic “tutelage” of the workers’ interests by the upper classes. It must have been for this reason that conservative Catholics were slow in accepting the idea of unions. For the notion of autonomy could be seen as implying a kind of equality among social classes, something contrary to Thomistic social hierarchism. For conservative Catholics who were accustomed to the images of the capitalists as the “fathers” of their workers, and of the landowners as “princes” and their employees as their “subjects”,¹ it was hard to see the workers as equal partners at the bargaining table.

But as the twentieth century dawned, many Italian Catholics came to consider the patriarchalism of the “superior” classes old fashioned, an echo from the past. Young Catholic activists were especially vocal in pressing for the recognition of the proletariat as an autonomous social force, the master of its own fate. “The people will refuse to remain the brute, anonymous, grey force of society”, “the eternal child in a perpetual need of guidance, unable to reach the age of maturity, become *sui generis* and govern itself”, wrote a young Christian Democrat, Alessandro Cantono, in 1902.² By 1906, even a high ranking churchman, Bishop Geremia Bonomelli, compared the “people” to a “youth who becomes convinced that he does not need tutelage anymore and demands to be recognized as of age and able to act under his own responsibility”.³

¹ Achille Sassoli de’ Bianchi, *La questione sociale nelle campagne* (Acquapendente, 1922), pp. 15-18. The volume records a speech made by the Marchese Sassoli de’ Bianchi at a Catholic congress in 1879. The speech, it appears, acted as a catalyst in forming the social ideas of the leaders of Italian Catholic Action. Their biographies mention that the Marchese’s arguments were decisive in forming the intellectual outlooks of Medolago Albani and Nicolo Rezzara, two of the top leaders of the *Unione Economico-Sociale*: Stanislao Medolago Albani, *Due campioni dell’azione cattolica bergamasca*: Prof. Comm. Nicolo Rezzara, Prof. Cav. Giambattista Caironi (Bergamo, 1916), pp. 8ff.; Alfonso Casoli, *Un campione della causa cattolica: il Conte Stanislao Medolago Albani* (Acquapendente, 1922), pp. 10ff. Sassoli de’ Bianchi’s speech was reprinted in 1922, as the first in a series of Catholic propaganda pamphlets. The editor told in the foreword that “the passing of time did not effect the eternal actuality of this speech”. Here is a passage from it: “We have to become convinced that every landed estate is like a little state, that within its confines the landowner is a little prince, who, in order to preserve the legitimacy of his power, has the duty to assure the well-being of his dependents.” Elsewhere the Marchese mentions the employees of the landowner as his “subjects”.

² Alessandro Cantono, *Le Università popolari e la democrazia* (Rome, 1902), *passim*.

³ Geremia Bonomelli, *La Chiesa e i tempi nuovi* (Cremona, 1906), p. 28.

Catholic labor organizers in direct contact with the working classes could not help but notice that the Italian proletariat was showing a growing “diffidence toward those who were not their companions”. An article in the *Settimana Sociale*, a weekly published by the *Unione Economico-Sociale* which directed the organizations of Catholic labor, warned of “an ever increasing consciousness of their own strength” among the workers that went together with a refusal to “confide their destiny to those who pretended to know better” the aspirations of the proletariat than the workers themselves. The *Settimana Sociale* stated that the working classes were turning away from the “brave people” who posed as their “tutors”.¹ Catholic labor organizers learned that Italian workers saw the road to their emancipation not in the “tutelage” of the “superior” classes, but in their own efforts.

But if their experience led Catholic labor organizers to such conclusions, it also set them on a collision course with the leaders of the Church, who as late as 1910 expressed a marked preference for “mixed” unions, which were to include both the workers and their employers. The proletarians were to cooperate with their masters in the “mixed” unions, and guided by the mutual obligations of charity, protect an assumed shared interest. The capitalists and landowners were to preside over this amiable social idylllike “fathers”. The image of a happy family!² Such forms of organization, it was assumed, would not “offer false economic advantages”, and would not “inspire the workers to rebellion and anticlericalism”, as Catholic conservatives like Cardinal Sarto once feared non-Catholic unions were doing.³

But the capitalists tended not to live up to the image of the father, and the workers were anything but resigned to the role of children. The Catholic activists who became involved in organizing labor soon learned this, and also became aware of the fact that if they insisted on “mixed” organizations, they could not counter the anticlerical socialists in organizing unions. The workers simply did not want “mixed”

¹ G. B. Bert, “E i sott’ufficiali dove sono?”, in: *Settimana Sociale*, June 24, 1911, p. 201.

² Alfonso Capecelatro, *La Povertà, l’Industria e il Sapere in relazione al Cristianesimo* (Rome, 1908), p. 22. Catholic social thought assigned to the family a central role in the life of society. Catholic sociologists, like Toniolo, were so much concerned with the family that their whole understanding of society – nothing but a large family for them – revolved around analogies based upon it. One of these analogies was the “mixed” union, which presumably approximated the organic cooperation, necessary solidarity and mutual dependence among the members of the family. See Antonio Boggiano Pico (at one time the President of the *Unione Popolare*), “L’attualità del pensiero di Giuseppe Toniolo”, in: Boggiano Pico et al., *Per una coscienza sociale* (Rome, 1943), p. 58.

³ Marchesan, *Papa Pio X*, p. 404.

organizations. It was part of the assertion of the autonomy of the Fourth Estate that they have organizations of their own. And if even Pope Leo XIII acknowledged this right, then why the apparent insistence of his successor on “mixed” unions?

It is easy to imagine the frustration felt by Catholic labor organizers when they read in *L'Osservatore Romano* that “mixed” unions were the indispensable means of “social regeneration”, that they “represent and must represent the true ideal for Catholic social action”. This statement, with its authoritative tone, came in April of 1910, after years of experience had shown that the “mixed” organization was not a working proposition.¹ The editorial was more than just the private opinion of the editorial writer of *L'Osservatore Romano*. During November of the same year, a national congress of Catholic Action in Modena was to debate, among other problems, the organization of labor. *L'Osservatore Romano* obviously aimed at assuring that Catholic “professional” organizations – the usual Catholic term for organizations of labor – remained “mixed” rather than taking the forms of “simple” unions: separate organizations for employers and employees. And if such was indeed the case, the effort was in vain.

The leaders of the *Unione Economico-Sociale* were known for being very receptive toward suggestions coming from the Vatican. But the lesson of *L'Osservatore Romano* seems to have been lost even on them. The report presented to the Congress by the Directive Council of the *Unione* failed to emphasize the unique importance of the “mixed” union, and presented it only as an alternative to separate organizations for workers and capitalists, indicating that in most instances separate organizations were to be preferred.² The report was a deviation from the official attitude of the Church as expressed by *L'Osservatore Romano* in April. But it obviously did not deviate enough for the taste of the activists attending the Congress in large numbers. Their long suppressed frustration with the “mixed” union exploded – in the words of the reporter of *L'Osservatore Romano* – into “a violent indictment of the *Unione Economico-Sociale*”. Virtually all the speakers rejected the report of the *Unione* as “impractical”, and inevitably pointed to the “mixed” model as the epitome of impracticality.³

Stanislao Medolago Albani and Nicolo Rezzara, the two highest ranking functionaries of the *Unione Economico-Sociale* present at the Congress, worked hard to resolve the apparent conflict between the

¹ *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 6, 1910.

² *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 30, 1910; De Rosa, *Storia del movimento cattolico*, pp. 526ff.; Pietro Scoppola, *Dal neoguefismo alla Democrazia Cristiana* (Rome, 1957), pp. 111ff.

³ *L'Osservatore Romano*, November 11, 12 and 14, 1910.

desires of the high church leadership and the convictions of Catholic activists. And apparently they could achieve this only through a compromise. The resolution finally adopted by the Congress omitted the concept of “mixed” unions and proposed separate organizations, one kind for the workers and another for the “middle classes” (*ceto medio*). Reviewing approvingly the decisions of the Congress in an editorial, *L'Osservatore Romano* did not mention the idea of mixed unions, either.¹ Silence was golden, and as on other occasions in the history of the Church, silence was a sign of change.

After the closing of the 1910 Congress even lip service was rarely paid to the principle of “mixed” unions,² and Italian Catholic Action concentrated its efforts on professional organizations based on separate social classes, as the activist speakers at the Congress demanded. But the leaders of the *Unione Economico-Sociale* apparently refused to be exclusively concerned with the working classes. Because such was the will of the Pope, they said, and because they aimed to maintain a “social equilibrium”, they set out to organize unions for the employers

¹ The text of the relevant resolutions adopted by the Congress of Modena is printed in *Azione Sociale*, November 1910, pp. 196ff. See also *L'Osservatore Romano*, November 18, 1910.

² Rezzara, who as the rapporteur of the *Unione Economico-Sociale* had to face the revolt of the angry young activists, already sounded the retreat at the Congress. Answering his critics at the end of the debate, he said that the “mixed organizations must remain abandoned for the time being, but they must not be forgotten, like the torch that must never be extinguished” (*L'Osservatore Romano*, November 12, 1910). Rezzara's chief, Medolago Albani, still did not put the torch out in 1914. In May of that year in a circular sent to the member organizations of the *Unione* he still listed the “mixed” type as a possible organizational form for labor (*Azione Sociale*, May 1914, pp. 93-94). But his words were hardly more than an attempt to please his master, Pius X, whose favored idea, the “mixed” union, was by then largely abandoned in organizational practice. It was a mirage from times long past that kept the imagination of conservative Catholics captive with the concept of “mixed” unions. When they defended the idea of “mixed” organizations they inevitably referred to the medieval guilds that supposedly united the *padroni* and the workers in a conflictless cooperation based on the principles of Christianity. A nostalgia for this utopia is apparent even in Monetti's volumes published as late as 1913. He still insists that the “mixed” organizations should be preferred by Catholics “where they are possible”. But he concedes that in large-scale modern industry, that tends to take the form of *Società Anonima*, property of shareholders, there is need for a separate representation and organization for the capitalists and the workers. Besides, Monetti says, in many places it is impossible to organize “mixed” unions because the *padroni* are not interested in them. See his *Problemi varii*, I, pp. 108-28; relevant arguments also in *Azione Sociale*, November 1910, pp. 183ff.; January 1911, pp. 1ff.; H. J. Leroy, *Le clergé et les oeuvres sociales* (Paris, n.d.), p. 14 (Leroy's volume was translated into Italian and sold by the *Unione Popolare*).

(*organizzazioni padronali*) along with unions for the workers.¹ Although this arrangement apparently recognized the autonomy and mutual independence of the two social strata, it was not intended to encourage conflict among them.

The arguments of Giulio Monetti, the Thomist sociologist, harmonized with the convictions of conservative Catholic leaders like Pius X when he stated that class conflict was unnecessary and mostly due to the activities of “utopian dreamers”, those “political agitators” who “substituted brutal force for rights”. Class conflicts, Monetti continued, were “paralyzing” and “destructive”. Presumably if only those agitators would go away and the “rich” would follow the dictates of charity and distribute their “superfluous”, like good Christians, “class struggle would be much reduced, if not completely eliminated”.²

Pius X, who praised Monetti’s argument, was consistent in his denunciation of class struggle. “Aversion to the superior classes”, he declared in 1906, “has to be held contrary to the real spirit of Christianity.”³ His words are to be seen as a response to a wave of strikes that enveloped Italy during the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century. The Pope’s warning was echoed by a series of editorials in *L’Osservatore Romano*, the official organ of the Church, which condemned the strikes as unlawful. The editorials demanded that the government break up the strikes by force, if necessary, by use of arms. *L’Osservatore Romano* argued that it was the duty of the public authorities to repress strikes and dissolve the workers’ organizations, especially the *Camere di Lavoro*, which coordinated strikes and gave aid and comfort to striking workers. *L’Osservatore Romano* issued a call to the “ruling classes” to defend the principle of “authority” by suppressing the strikes, and darkly hinted about the possibility of a civil war if the strikes continued. “The patience of authentic people, of those who are not hooligans, has a limit and a measure beyond which it is not prudent to go”, the paper stated.⁴

The word “hooligans” (*teppisti*) was one of the milder ones used by

¹ Azione Sociale, November 1912, pp. XXIX(sic)ff.; March 1913, p. 56; *L’Osservatore Romano*, January 16, 1913.

² Monetti, *Problemi vari*, II, pp. 118-25.

³ Pius X, encyclical *Pieni l’Animo*, in: *Civiltà Cattolica*, LVII (1906), III, p. 392. Pius’ very first encyclical, *E Supremi Apostolatus* (loc. cit., pp. 129-49), voiced a strong opposition to class struggle. And his probably last public utterance, a speech to a Consistory in May 1914, returned to the subject. In this speech the condemnation of class conflict became the sternest: the old Pontiff, who foresaw the coming of a worldwide conflagration, now presented the image of conflict among classes growing into a frightful deluge of hatred, a conflict among nations (Azione Sociale, May 1914, pp. 85-88).

⁴ *L’Osservatore Romano*, May 13, July 15 and 18, 1906; October 18 and 23, 1907.

L'Osservatore Romano in describing strikers. The terms “mob” (*plebaglia*), and “scoundrels” (*barabba*) were employed in reference to the “social sub-stratum” (*sub-strato sociale*) involved in labor unrest. Strikers were also compared to the “brigands” (*briganti*) of decades past.¹ The editorial writers of *L'Osservatore Romano* were clearly venting an upper-class contempt for the workers. Their sense of charity led them to declare that the strikers were acting against their own interests: after all, the workers had stepped outside the limits set by their tutors! But the editorial writers not only saw in strikes evidence of the workers' inability to take care of their own interests; they were not above expelling the strikers from the human race – the “authentic people” – and presenting them as common criminals.

With its rejection of the workers' rights to strike, the paper of the Vatican showed the Church on the side of the capitalists in labor conflicts. And this seriously jeopardized the Church's efforts to counter socialist propaganda and organizational gains among the Italian workers. It also gave the proletariat a very concise idea of the limits of the “tutelage” that the official social doctrine of the Church proclaimed as the duty of the “superior” classes: it obviously excluded any encroachment on the material interests of the upper classes.

The position taken by *L'Osservatore Romano* in connection with strikes can only be understood in the context of the Church's condemnation of class conflict as contrary to the precepts of Christian *caritas*. During the early years of the papacy of Pius X, official Catholic social doctrine considered strikes manifestations of class struggle. And class struggle was apparently seen as a menace to the hierarchical social order established by God, hence a rebellion against the “Author of the social order”, God Himself.²

If some conservative Church leaders found it hard to become resigned even to economically motivated confrontations between social classes, this was due in great part to their Thomistic orientation. While Neo-Thomism made clear that economic and social distinctions were just as inevitable as differences in intelligence levels among individuals, it also left a good deal of confusion in Catholic sociology. For one thing, it had no clear distinction between the economic, social and political realms of life. This was to be expected in view of the close adherence at the turn of the century of Thomists to the medieval

¹ *L'Osservatore Romano*, May 10, 11 and 16, 1906.

² The wording is that of Toniolo, the leading Catholic sociologist of the era, and also the most important leader of Italian Catholic Action. See his “L'Unione cattolica per gli studi sociali”, loc. cit., p. 89. But the terminology appears in Monetti also: *Problemi varii*, II, pp. 97-98.

schemes reflected in Aquinas' writings. In medieval society there was no clear distinction between social and political functions; it was merely assumed that the wealthy would also hold the reins of government. Conservatives, like Pius X, trapped as they were in this frame of reference, were bound to be unable to distinguish between the economic and political aspects of class conflict.

The Christian Democratic activists, in contrast, exposed as they were to reality, and aware of the needs and desires of the workers, came to realize that the betterment of the life and salary conditions of the working classes was not possible without strikes, without forcing concessions from the capitalists and landowners. The road of charity led to the picket lines. Eventually the *Azione Sociale*, the official publication of the *Unione Economico-Sociale*, which always faithfully followed the line of the Vatican, came to view strikes a necessary evil, a fact of life.¹

By 1912, even *L'Osservatore Romano*, which must have made itself notorious during the previous decade with its rigid opposition to strikes, seems to have become resigned to the "peaceful struggles of competition" between the "professional" organizations of the workers and the capitalists.² Was this editorial an evidence that the official Catholic social doctrine was modified and the Church came to accept strikes as legitimate? In a restricted sense the official position of the Church can only be weighed in the Pope's words. But the only corroborating evidence on the part of Pius X was his silence. Pius X was always quick to "correct" Catholics whose views differed from his own. Would he not have done the same in connection with the editorial policies of the official paper of the Vatican?

We are probably justified in taking the Pope's silence as evidence that the views of Pius X, and with them the official social doctrines of the Church, were changing. Under pressures from his followers the Thomistic vision of society was slowly receding in the Pope's outlook

¹ G. Molteni, who seems to have been the specialist the *Azione Sociale* employed to write on the problems of strikes, showed a change of mind about strikes within a remarkably short time. In October 1907 he appears to have taken the viewpoint of the capitalists, objected to strikes and presented the workers' "impulsiveness" and "ignorance" as the primary causes of strikes. But a few months later, in January of 1908, he seems to have become resigned to strikes, which he then considered the "essential, the principal weapon of the workers in pursuing their democratic claims". He stated that strikes were "often" "legitimate, even necessary" and argued that their pastoral mission obligated priests to become "interested" in them (*Azione Sociale*, January, May, October and November-December 1907; January-February and May 1908; November 1911; March 1913).

² *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 14, 1912.

during the last years of his reign. The young Catholic activists who most adamantly opposed Thomism did so because they felt that the Thomistic utopia prevented Catholic social doctrine from realistically confronting the problems of modern society. Under the pressure of reality, not only the young activists, but even some conservatively oriented Catholic leaders like Medolago Albani and Boggiano, the President of the *Unione Popolare*, arrived at an understanding of the Social Question that was at variance with the official social doctrine of the Church. Relatively early in their lives, they both gave signs of doubting that charity alone could resolve the problems involved in the modern Social Question. And like the young activists, Boggiano seems to have been convinced that the Social Question was primarily economic and not moral and religious as Pius X presented it.¹

Even their concern with morality turned Catholics toward the dismal physical conditions of the working classes. The nascent social sciences during the years of the papacy of Pius X were providing the first scientific evidence that connected poverty, unemployment and crime. That Catholics were aware of these findings was shown by the fact that even the usually traditionalist and conservative *L'Osservatore Romano* echoed these arguments in an editorial.²

But Catholics would have demanded the improvement of the workers' living conditions, even if they resisted the spell of social science which was gaining increasing respect among intellectuals during that period. The fates and fortunes of Catholic movements abroad also impressed upon Italian Catholics the need for social reforms. News about the tribulations of French Catholics, for instance, filled the front pages of Italian Catholic papers, which described the "oppression" of French Catholics at the hands of an "atheistic" and anti-clerical parliamentary majority. And a pamphlet of the *Unione Popolare* stated that French Catholics suffered defeat because they were thought to be "reactionaries, which implied that they opposed legislation in favor of the workers, that they were contrary to social reform in favor of the Fourth Estate". A representative of the French Catholics told a meeting of his Italian coreligionists in 1907 that the "people had to be convinced, and the sooner the better, that Catholics are the first to work for the improvement" of the working classes' material conditions.³

¹ Medolago Albani, *Le classi dirigenti*, passim; Antonio Boggiano Pico, *L'importanza degli studi economici nella cultura e nell'azione del clero* (Rome, 1901), passim; Gennaro Avolio, *I cattolici di fronte a'mali sociali* (Naples, 1895), passim.

² *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 21, 1912.

³ I. Imberciadori, *L'Unione Popolare fra i cattolici d'Italia* (Rome, 1909), p. 90.

If the French provided a negative example, German Catholic Action gave a positive object lesson to Italian Catholics. Surrounded by Protestants, in a seemingly hostile environment, a Catholic minority in Germany vindicated their religious, social and political rights with such success that Pius X chose their *Volksverein* as the model for Italian Catholic Action. In a guest editorial on the pages of *L'Osservatore Romano*, one of the leaders of German Catholic Action, very emphatic in the points he made, gave the key to the Germans' success. "Christian social policy", he said,

"would be on a dead end street if it were limited to sterile opposition, if it were solely on the defensive, if it fought the social errors only [...] The sole efficient way to combat the social revolution was to press for social reforms [...] It is always better to prevent the development of poverty than to mitigate it temporarily: in other words, social work is more important than alms. We must not forget that social justice as an obligation goes beyond the duties of charity."¹

Such was the respect for German Catholic Action, and so eager was the Church hierarchy to learn the secret of the Germans' success, that the editors of *L'Osservatore Romano* took this slight at charity and alms, the Pope's all-important principles, with good grace and did not refute it.

And the German followers of Pius X were not alone among Catholics in suggesting that the solution of the Social Question could not come through the charitable activities of "a few friends of the people", but must come through a consistent policy of social legislation. The assumption of social responsibilities by the state, "official" forms of charity that Cardinal Sarto once so adamantly opposed,² had been urged by Italian writers also.³ And like the Germans, they were not "corrected" by the Pope.

¹ *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 21, 1905; also February 21, 1912.

² When he was only a few years away from his election to the papal throne, Cardinal Sarto told a gathering of Catholic sociologists that the "substitution of official alms for private alms amounts to the destruction of Christianity, and it is an attempt on the principle of property [...] If aid comes [to the poor] through laws, and alms are not motivated by the heart, because they not free any more, they lose their merit before God. The tie of love that alone can unite the poor and rich is broken and poverty becomes a function, an office, a public occupation." Quoted in Dal-Gal (ed.), *Insegnamenti di San Pio X*, pp. 73-76.

³ Salvatore Talamo, *La questione sociale e i cattolici* (Rome, 1896), p. 39; Capecelatro, *Amiamo il popolo*, pp. 19-21, 30-31; *La Povertà*, p. 18; *La Quistione Sociale e il Cristianesimo* (Rome, 1907), p. 20. Cardinal Capecelatro, one of the most prolific and popular among the Catholic writers of the era, was especially emphatic in pointing out the need for the intervention of public authorities in

Then in 1912, in an encyclical titled, *Lacrimabili Statu Indorum*, the Pope himself adopted a line of argument that seems to have differed from his previous views. The document was a condemnation of those who kept the indigenous population of South America in horrifying misery. It ended with the Pope's urging the public authorities to put an end to the ruthless exploitation of the Indians.¹ That this might bring about a substitution of "official" forms of charity for private alms was not mentioned. That a social action directed by the state against the wealthy might break the "tie of love that alone can unite the poor and the rich", his earlier argument, did not seem to concern Pius X when he wrote *Lacrimabili Statu Indorum*.

Sarto's horizon widened immensely when he became pope. From the awesome height of the throne of Peter he surveyed all of mankind, not a small village or a provincial town where he lived earlier in his life. Yet, to state expressly that this global view of social problems led him to a change of opinion, and cite *Lacrimabili Statu Indorum* as the evidence of this change, will probably invite a debate. For papal encyclicals are concerned with eternal truths, for Catholics. If we may talk of "changes" evident in papal encyclicals, they are usually shifts in emphasis. When it "changes", Catholic theology simply neglects one element and turns toward another in the immense treasury of the Church's intellectual tradition.²

When Pius X conceded the need for the state's concern in the solution of the Social Question, he did not even have to abandon the Thomistic theological framework. The formidable Aquinas could be quoted to support that notion, too. The state, he said, cannot be absent from the economic world:

"it has to be there to opportunely promote the production of a sufficient volume of goods, the use of which is necessary for the exercise of virtue."³

Toniolo, following the lead of Aquinas, emphasized that the principal function of the state was to "coordinate human social progress for the

the solution of the Social Question. He went as far as to suggest that Italy should set an example for other nations by establishing within the government a "Ministry of Beneficence and Labor".

¹ Pius X, encyclical *Lacrimabili Statu Indorum*, in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, August 6, 1912.

² James O'Gara, Introduction to O'Gara (ed.), *The Layman in the Church* (New York, 1962), p. 9.

³ Aquinas, *De Regimine Principum*, I, ch. 15. See also Achille Malagola, *Le teorie politiche di San Tommaso d'Aquino* (Bologna, 1912), pp. 63, 76-79, 80, 195; Alessandro Passerin d'Entreves, *La filosofia politica medioevale* (Turin, 1934), pp. 109ff.; Di Carlo, *La filosofia giuridica*, pp. 106ff.

best attainment of the moral and material goals of civilization".¹ And Leo XIII, who opposed the intervention of the state in social problems during the first years of his papacy, later seems to have changed his mind. The *Rerum Novarum*, issued in 1891, not only accepted the principle of the state's responsibility in the welfare of citizens, but indicated the special need for action in connection with the working classes.²

In stressing the obligations of public authorities in the social security of the citizens, Leo XIII usually referred to Aquinas, in the same way Catholic activists supported their program of social reforms with references to Leonine encyclicals during the papacy of Pius X. Thus, by making it one of the principal duties of the state to assure the material well-being of the citizens, Thomism, that vision of medieval community, became a powerful lever of social reformism in a society that, because its major sustaining ideological force was laissez-fairism, tended to neglect social responsibilities.

Regnum non est propter regem, sed rex propter regnum. The archaic words in medieval Latin rang like old church bells over the industrial slums of Milan and Turin, over the *borgate*, the slum tenements of Rome, over the poverty-stricken villages of Abruzzi, over the mine-fields and *latifondi* of Sicily. The state had responsibilities for the life conditions of its citizens, said the Angelic Doctor. And Italian Catholics echoed his words.

The activists' pressure for social reforms implied in a way the abandonment of the Thomistic framework. For these reforms were to lead to the restriction of the economic privileges of the rich. Added taxes were needed if the state were to come to the aid of the working classes, the social stratum toward which the Thomistic category of "poor" pointed. But Aquinas left the rich free to decide not only what part of their "superfluous" they were going to give away to the "poor", but also whom to give it to and when.³ Now the state was to invade the sacrosanct Thomistic realm of the "superfluous". Discarding the term that was made respectable by centuries of tradition, the "superfluous" was to be profanely called "profit" and taxed.

As the papacy of Pius X was coming to a close, Catholic sociologists

¹ As cited in Franca Falcucci, "Lo stato nel pensiero di Giuseppe Toniolo", *Civitas*, New Series, X (1959), p. 26.

² Leo XIII, encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, loc. cit., pp. 195-96; Camp, *The Papal Ideology of Social Reform*, pp. 138ff.

³ Aquinas, *Summa*, II/II, qq. 7, 32-33; John A. Ryan, "The Economic Philosophy of St. Thomas", in: Robert E. Brennan (ed.), *Essays in Thomism* (New York, 1942), p. 247.

became less inclined to declare, as Toniolo, the old master of Italian sociology did in 1893, that social science had to be “an apology for charity”, and that charity was “a scientific category”.¹ In confronting social and political problems, Neo-Thomism was destined to wane as the new century set in.² During the first two decades of the twentieth century, many Italian Catholics gradually abandoned the Neo-Thomistic utopia of medieval society, and with it the insistence upon the all-encompassing modern validity of notions like charity and alms that grew out of Thomism. The more they became involved in social action, the more insufficient a reliance on the individual conscience alone in dealing with the problem of the working classes appeared to Italian Catholics. They had to realize that the fate of the “poor” had

¹ Giuseppe Toniolo, “La funzione della Giustizia e della carità nell’odierna crisi sociale”, first published in 1893, reprinted in *Opera Omnia*, Fourth Series, III, pp. 359-67.

² The waning of Thomism in fact began earlier, probably with *Aeterni Patris*, the encyclical that made it an official doctrine of the Church. Monsignor Masnovò, the historian of Italian Neo-Thomism, who cannot be accused of either anti-Catholic or anti-Thomistic bias, testifies to this. Soon after 1880, he says, the Neo-Thomistic current that “gained in extension” began to “lose in profundity”. Its newly gained popularity amounted to a vulgarization and fed into a superficiality in turn (Masnovò, “Il neotomismo”, loc. cit., p. 101). But one is tempted to ask, of course, if this is not the fate of every official doctrine? The waning of Neo-Thomism in Italy during the papacy of Pius X was shown by the fact that the Thomistic review *Divus Thomas*, published in Rome since 1880, folded up in 1905, apparently because the narrowing number of subscribers did not provide sufficient support for its survival. It was to be revived in 1909 under the personal guidance of Pius X in the form of the *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica*. But the new review, at least during the era of Pius X, was characterized by an almost total lack of interest in the application of Thomism to social and political problems. Yet in spite of its apparent waning at the turn of the century, Neo-Thomism as a social philosophy survived among some Catholics, as Spiazzi et al., *Teologia e storia della carità* testifies. The volume, written in the 1960’s, still insists on the validity of Thomistic social ideas (passim, particularly pp. 178, 419-21). The writers who contributed to the volume still seem to assume that the “poor” are to remain forever on the social landscape. The solution of the social problems involving the “poor” is framed up in terms of *assistenza*. The most important form of this “assistance”, the writers maintain, is private charity. Public assistance, one of the essayists says, is only to supplement private and church charity. Disregarding apparently the Thomistic tradition of the social responsibility of the state, this writer, Carlo Messori, argues that the social activity of the state should be limited to those problems that private and church charity cannot resolve. Like social and political conservatives in other countries, these Italian Catholic authors seem to fear that the welfare state would sooner or later turn into a totalitarian state. And this leads them into arguments that characterize the *laissez-faire* arguments of yesteryear, used against socialists by conservative liberals. Considering that it was born as a counter-ideology to liberalism, Neo-Thomism seems to have run a full circle.

to be a subject of legally guaranteed rights. But this implied in turn that the Catholics, those self-proclaimed champions of the "poor", had to gain representation in the Parliament, where laws were made and modified.

In view of the long-standing papal ban on the participation of Italian Catholics in national elections – the *Non Expedit* – the propaganda pamphlets of the *Unione Popolare* had an enigmatic quality. For they reminded Italian Catholics that "the secret of the prosperity of society everywhere lay in laws, and the laws [in Italy] are made by the deputies you elect. Use your vote wisely, use it to make just laws and to remake the existing ones."¹ The Catholics' acceptance of a program of economic reformism increased the pressure for the lifting of the *Non Expedit*, which was the frustrated Church leadership's retaliation for the occupation of Rome, the last remnant of the papal state. But the papal ban which made Italy's Catholic citizens pawns in the chess game between the Vatican and the new Italian state, increasingly proved to be impractical. For one thing, elections were held and voters went to the polls: in nominally all-Catholic Italy, this was a clear evidence of the failure of the *Non Expedit*. The ban, in fact, was damaging to Catholic interests because it deprived Italian Catholics of representation in the parliament.

Catholics, especially young activists, increasingly demanded the lifting of the *Non Expedit*. Responding to these pressures, Pius X gradually allowed Catholics to participate in national elections. By 1913, virtually all Catholic voters could go to the polls. As was the case with the changes in social policies, no dramatic papal announcement heralded the change in the Vatican's political position. Silence on the part of Pius X and secret negotiations with other political forces marked the Catholics' descent into the Italian political arena.

And if the road of charity thus led Catholics to the polls, it also pointed in the direction of a Catholic electoral alliance with liberal politicians led by Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti. For the liberals were seeing through parliament some of the very same reform legislation Catholics were urging.² Catholic pressure for legislative action in response to the Social Question came to reinforce the aims of Giolittian

¹ Imberciadori, *L'Unione Popolare*, p. 34.

² On Giolittian New Liberalism and the liberal-Catholic alliance see my "Giolitti's Reform Program, An Exercise in Equilibrium Politics", in: *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXXVI (1971), pp. 637-53. Also related to the topics discussed in this paper are other two essays of mine: "Christian Democracy and Social Modernism in Italy during the Papacy of Pius X", forthcoming in the March 1973 issue of *Church History*, and "Germania Doceat: the Volksverein, the Model for Italian Catholic Action (1905-1914)", forthcoming in *Catholic Historical Review*.

New Liberalism during the early twentieth century. Paradoxically, a waning Neo-Thomism and the offspring of its one-time opponent, liberalism, were joining forces in the transformation of the old liberal state. With its arguments in favor of the state's social responsibility, Thomistic philosophy, that mine of all the veins of human wisdom from Aristotle to the Middle Ages, still gave support to Catholics. They still could claim that they remained Thomists. They did not change. It was their Thomism that changed. Relinquishing medieval charity as the sole solution for the Social Question, Catholics were emerging from the Dark Ages, a contemporary observer could have said with a touch of Voltairian sarcasm. Italian Catholic social action was coming of age.