

PERSONALITY AND GAIN (II)

Granted that Capitalism arose under Catholicism and not, as Weber and even Marx believed, only with the loss of unified temporal power by Rome and the rise of the Protestant Reformation, individualism and the spirit of free inquiry; yet, as Fanfani explains, Catholicism and capitalism are unalterably opposed, two utterly different views of life and ethics, and any study of their interrelations must take note of that. A distinction must be made between what actually happened and how it should have happened; the moral question with its implication of the whole of Catholic doctrine permeates any factual, dispassionate analysis as such. He distinguishes between religious ethics and the actual apparatus of the Church. "The relations between capitalism and the Catholic Church as an organization must not be confused with the relations between capitalism and the Catholic religion"; "it should be plain to all how mistaken it is, in considering the relations between capitalism and Catholicism, deliberately to pause at this or that fact, this or that measure, this or that action, for which, whatever its results, responsibility lies not with Catholicism as a doctrine, but with some individual Catholic, be he Pope or sacristan." An arraignment of capitalism on such grounds is almost literally an ideal one; it moves with an exclusively moral sphere, and it never allows the actual recording of history to be confused with constructive suggestiveness.

The divorce between ethics and economics which Bishop Henson and the *Times* maintained, was rightly condemned as implying that there are some human actions which are independent of morality. The great ethical and economical principle first enunciated by St. Paul—"the Husbandman that laboureth must partake of the fruits" (II Tim. ii, 6)—is the determining factor of the industrial order which all classes of the State—capitalist, producer, consumer—must unite to establish. The teaching of Pope Leo XIII, if heeded forty years ago, would have changed the face of industrial society, and therein the necessary alliance of economics with

ethics was maintained essentially in the fundamental least common denominator of justice. And the basic principle of justice is not necessarily the principle of equality. The latter is, for example, obviously inadequate as a standard of reference in cases where several people have a joint interest in one going concern. It would not be just if all citizens were taxed equally, regardless of the size of their incomes; it is just that every citizen should be taxed in proportion to his ability to pay. Again, it would not be just if every participant in a business were to receive equal compensation; it is just that compensation should be fixed in proportion to his contribution or in proportion to his deserts. The man who labours for wages is a partner in a going concern, not a seller of labour. Labour is not a commodity. Wages, therefore, should not be governed by the principle of equality. The wage which merely equals an arbitrary value of labour is not a just wage. Wage earners should be paid according to their needs and not merely according to their efficiency. Specifically, the bread winner of a large family should receive a greater compensation than the worker who supports no-one but himself.

It is an essential duty of the government to see to it that the principles of economic justice are observed. Trade and industry should be under government supervision in order to ensure that individual concerns should not fail in disbursing just wages to their partners on the one hand, and in charging just prices to their customers on the other. The government should prevent the concentration of property in the hands of a few because the system of absentee ownership is opposed to the institution of private property. Hoarding and cornering of merchandise should be forbidden because such speculation is conducted solely for the sake of profit and not for the sake of general benefit.

But justice alone is insufficient to achieve the proper ends of economy. It must be supplemented by charity, not "charity" as represented by Poor Law and similar institutions, but charity which is supernatural love. Charity in this true sense is, indeed, the nobler of the two virtues: while justice pertains to elementary duty, charity is a

voluntary link which unites man with God.

It is futile to attack merely accidental phenomena. The root of the trouble is that the spiritual life of the individual is divorced from the present mechanical organization of society; and the non-material needs, often more instinctive than conscious, are a very real element in the personal economy of the majority, especially in the ranks of the workers. The readiness with which the masses, who are alleged, and often encouraged, to care only for material benefits, champion ethical causes proves that the need for ideals is felt, and urges the reconciliation of this need with the cultural tradition of Christianity. It is our hope that England will play a great part in constructing the new synthesis, because her culture, developed in insular safety, rested on the assured bases of the family and the land, and on the Christian principles governing both these elements in their relation to one another.

The historical process, as Christopher Dawson sees it, exhibits first of all a religion-culture, or a way of life consciously deriving from a spiritual base; next a developed civilization which doubts the validity of its own foundation; and lastly a new synthesis in which philosophy and practice are once more unified. He urges further that this process is necessary since religion emphasizes its own realities in contrast to this world of appearances, so that there must needs be a divorce between religion and life followed by a demand for their unification. Studied in this perspective the opposition of Catholicism to the capitalist spirit can be put in strictly logical form. Capitalism to exist cannot have other than economic motives; all the teachings of the Church point the way to a view of life that shall be grounded in the life of the soul and the consciousness of a divine order; "the capitalistic conception of life is founded on a separation of human aims. It fixes its gaze on natural and in particular on economic goals; it precludes supernatural religious goals." The Catholic, believing himself a free agent under the supervision of God, holds that every action, even if trivial, brings him nearer to final beatitude or takes him farther away, according to the moral goodness or otherwise

of the act. There can be no limits within such a view; "(it) transforms all activity into moral activity, and every act into a religious act." This does not imply that individual judgment is not possible; it must merely operate within the borders of moral doctrine.

If I, as a contractor, have to supply a factory with raw materials, I shall try to obtain them at the lowest possible cost. But, as a Catholic, I must see whether in practice this economic criterion does not conflict with higher extra-economic ends, social or religious. If this conflict exists, I may not hesitate but must choose the means that is economically more costly, but is, socially or religiously speaking, more rational. Ultimately all means must be judged, actually or virtually, from the standpoint of the attainment of God. Only when I have found this and adopted it, can my action lawfully begin.

According to Macmurray, life moves by the hunger motive and the love motive, and religion tends to idealize life by disregarding all the political and economic systems which channel the hunger motive; whilst radicalism tends to underestimate the force of the love motive, thus seeking to cure all ills of society by a reorganization of economic life. Religion in its most vital form, declares Professor Macmurray, seeks increasing mutuality. But this end cannot be achieved by purely spiritual means or by pure moral appeals to goodwill. The radical is right in seeking a basic reorganization of economic life so that the hunger motive may be made to support mutuality.

Many, for instance, feel rather than know that modern finance is perverted; but nevertheless they suspect monetary reformers of being philosophically unsound. Most people know that the working man is often denied a living wage in industry; yet some are so ignorant as to suspect the idea of the corporate state as being inextricably tied up with Fascism. In passing, it may be added that some members of the Social Guild are so dogged and single-minded about the Living Wage that they fail to realize how hopeless of realization it is at present. As Mr. Gregory Macdonald has pointed out, all talk of a Living Wage (and of Distributism)

is futile while finance and industry are controlled as they are at present. What, then, is to be the nature of the revolution that will change these primary conditions?

The general tendency to-day is to establish a leadership in an authoritarian state pledged to the re-establishment of economic justice. This new principle of leadership may claim the merit of providing a single leader, and of providing that leader with the continuous allegiance which enables him to pursue a continuous and long-range policy. But if it may claim that merit, it also suffers from serious disabilities—disabilities which affect the choice of the leader; disabilities which affect his action; disabilities which affect the eventual succession to his office. Under the system of democracy a reserve of potential leaders is steadily accumulated: their powers are tried and tested in the open and public process of debate; and the eventual choice of the leader is determined by the known and regular methods of a constitutional system. The new system of leadership abrogates any system of choice; it depends on the spontaneous emergence of a dominant personality; it works in the dark. The continuity of the leader in his office, which is another of the essential features of the new leadership, may affect his action for evil as well as for good, and prove a disability as well as a merit. He has indeed the opportunity of long-range policies; but he also incurs the danger of petrification. True leadership demands a fresh and vital impulse; and the period for which any one man can give such an impulse must necessarily be measured by a brief span of years. Democracy is wise in changing its leaders, because it secures a continuity of fresh impulse. It is thus ready—sometimes only too ready—to solve the problem of succession. The personal leader who has won his office by a right of emergence can offer no certain solution to that problem. By the very nature of his solitary position, he cannot accumulate a reserve of genuine political leaders from whom his successor may eventually emerge. They would be too dangerous to his power. He tends, voluntarily or involuntarily, to starve the supply of the future, and to leave the succession at the best to mediocrity and at the worst to chance. In its end, as in its

beginning and its intervening course, the Romantic principle of leadership defeats itself, and fails to secure its own ultimate aim.

But, in any case, to find a leader is not sufficient; there must be some ideology to inspire his leadership and the loyalty of his fellows. Two ideas which lie at the bottom of all modern revolutionary impulses—liberty and equality—are incompatible to such an extent as to exclude each other; and yet they are pronounced with equal enthusiasm. Liberty involves a free exercise of one's individual energy, will-power, talents and ambitions. As long as this exercise is really free, equality is impossible. Even if you distribute wealth according to the Communist gospel, the difference in talents, in ambitions and energies, remains; and these can be kept on an "equal" level only by means of a most ruthless tyranny. Liberty involves inequality in spite of all theories; for this is the law of living life.

Another fatal confusion is that of social castes or classes with social hierarchy. Rebelling against an imposed and tyrannical hierarchy, the egalitarian apostles usually mistake all hierarchy for tyranny, without realising that the principle of class-division subjects the whole material body to the interests of a single class; while the true hierarchic principle has in view a harmonious growth of the entire social organism. These two principles are in fact poles asunder. As soon as the idea of "classes" takes the ascendant, the social growth begins to degenerate into an external social struggle. And since wealth is the only means of power in this struggle, it inevitably becomes the absolute standard of values and the only aim of all who take part in it. The old aristocracy had at least the idea of honour and dignity. But its illegal heir, the modern plutocracy, has exchanged even these two things into cash.

The true and only satisfying ideology that must inspire the revolt against the tyranny of personal gain is the doctrine of personality taught by Our Lord and insisted on by the Church—*personality* which, paradoxically enough, is emphasized and perfected by absorption in a super-eminent way into the Personality of Christ through member-

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ship of His mystical Body. Given this ideal basis, it matters little what material form the constitution of society assumes, provided that it really caters for human life as a whole.

It was Dr. Tawney's idea in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* that the latter might be considered a way of life rather than an exclusively economic method of organization. Fanfani agrees, but with reservations. There is a capitalist spirit and a pre-capitalist spirit; the former "is nothing but the prevailing economic spirit of a given period . . . that complex inner attitude, conscious or subconscious, in virtue of which a man acts in a certain determined manner in business matters"; the latter implies "that the choice of means of acquiring goods is determined by criteria, not of pure utility, but of utility, only in so far as it compatible with the vigorous existence of extra-economic criteria"—in plain English, that there was more than the motive of greed involved, and that standards of production and even marketing could exist that might be concerned with more than the making of money. And it took some ten centuries, from the ninth to the eighteenth, for such a spirit to be obliterated or merely absorbed by the desire for personal gain. The old conception of personality was destroyed by an avid emphasis upon one form of its expression. For centuries the civil law in every land had made things easy for the usurer, and acquiesced in the domination of the Money Power. Moral theologians, ignorant of the intricacies of modern finance, adopted an attitude of *non sunt inquietandi* (leave well alone). Gradually, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Catholic sociologists came awake. The Fribourg Union made bold to identify Leo's "rapacious usury" and the prevailing system of credit. After *Rerum Novarum* followed forty years of silence and inaction. Then Pius XI spoke out:

"It is patent that in our days not alone is wealth accumulated, but immense power and despotic economic domination is concentrated in the hands of a few . . . This power becomes particularly irresistible when exercised by those who, because they hold and control money, are able also to govern credit and determine its allotment, for that reason supplying, so to

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speak, the life blood to the entire economic body, and grasping as it were in their hands the very soul of production, so that no one dare breathe against their will."

To emphasize what has gradually been taking shape in the Catholic consciousness, it is necessary to observe that the Church finds herself now in a world which is much the same as when she began, a pagan world the chief feature of which is the omnipotent State which knows no law higher than itself and no will other than its own. The wheel has come full circle. The Church has to begin again to Christianize a pagan world and build a new Christendom. But there is just this difference, that whereas in the beginning it was the pagan civilization that was dying and Christianity was the new life-principle flung into it, now it is the Christian civilization that is dying and Paganism that is the vitalizing principle inspiring much of the youth of all nations with enthusiasm and providing them with a creed for which they gladly die. Nevertheless "the gates of Hell shall not prevail," and the growing enthusiasm of our own Catholic youth the sign that is given to us. Theirs is the inspiring principle that has the power of God within it, productive of an enthusiasm that no earthly ideal can evoke, a creed for which they might justly be willing to die; for their Leader is Christ the King, and their gain is God.

FELIX HOPE.