

PROPERTY IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION. By Andrew Gordon, S.J.  
(Catholic Social Guild.)

The attitude of the Church to present day economic problems is well presented by Fr Gordon in this booklet. So far from there only being an alternative between unbridled Capitalism on the one hand and complete State Socialism on the other, he points out that the remedy is to be found in the right of man to private property, which right exists as a precept of the natural law. As a direct result of the possession of wealth by a few there has arisen a propertyless proletariat owning nothing but their ability and capacity to work. In opposition to this state of society is the concept of the State, concentrating all the resources of a country into its hands for the avowed benefit of the majority.

Both systems, Fr Gordon maintains, and here of course he has the whole weight of the social teaching of the Church on his side, are wrong precisely in so far as they both, though perhaps in different ways, limit the possession of private property. The one, in concentrating wealth into the hands of a few individuals to the exclusion of the vast majority, and the other, by concentrating the wealth of a country into the hands of the State.

In neither case is expression given to the natural law whereby man is able by his reason and free will to rule his actions. Possessing nothing he becomes under a Capitalist system a mere slave, and under an extreme form of State Socialism a robot, dependent for his every comfort upon the benignity of the State.

As one solution, Fr Gordon suggests a form of profit sharing and counters any objection that might be raised on the grounds that, although many would welcome a share in profits, few would welcome a share in losses, by proposing a concrete scheme. This is based on a limitation of dividends paid to shareholders merely investing and not contributing in any other way to production, and he suggests that after payment of an agreed dividend and all other charges, any profit should then be shared by the workers. The agreed dividend should be assessed over a period of years and adjustments made to balance trading losses. Ultimately, over that period of years, an investor would receive the equivalent of the agreed dividend, assuming that no adjustments had been necessary.

The advantage to the worker would be that he would in fact possess a greatly increased interest in the workings of his industry in the knowledge that upon his efforts depended the amount he would receive at the end of the year as his share of the profits.

In stressing finally the need for a new spirit of co-operation to supersede the bitterness of class warfare, Fr Gordon maintains the constructive nature of the Church's position with regard to the economic problems confronting men, who, without true Christian principles behind them, seem less and less capable of emerging from the chaotic conditions that the lack of such principles has produced.

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