

## A CATHOLIC DILEMMA?

**T**HAT Catholic social teaching has made but little impact on the public life of this country is a fact too well known to require emphasis here. We are now well accustomed to hear public speakers bewail Catholic apathy from our platforms. Apathy is, however, but a partial explanation of the failure of the Church's social teaching to make a deep impression even upon British Catholics and it is urgent that, instead of continuously bewailing this state of affairs, our writers and lecturers should make diligent inquiry as to the causes.

In so far as making an endeavour to shape the future social order of this country is concerned, it is, of course, quite true to assert that Catholics, as a whole, have shown little but indifference. But it is also true that this indifference is by no means confined to Catholics. Communist infiltration in Great Britain and, indeed, throughout the world (save where Communism has been imposed by armed force) has been made possible only by the neglect of the ordinary man to carry out his duty as a citizen in a democratic state.

This widespread indifference lies not so much in lack of interest (for the ordinary man of reasonable intelligence is keenly interested in discussion of at least those social problems which he thinks he can easily grasp) as in lack of energy—energy to acquire the necessary knowledge, energy to think out conclusions and energy to enter public life and act upon such conclusions. This lack of intellectual energy is, I think, a product of our industrial system, which, in the interests of increased production, has removed all pleasure from work, often leaving undiluted drudgery.

The ancient curse on man's daily labour remains but the still more ancient blessing has been removed. Naturally, therefore, the moment he is liberated from the undiluted drudgery by the factory whistle, the worker seeks the pleasure, also undiluted. Naturally, too, so much energy having been used up in the drudgery, the worker seeks pleasure at a comparatively low level, the kind which he can enjoy while relatively passive, such as the cinema show, the football match, or the greyhound racing, which require only to be looked at.

Sometimes we are asked why Catholics cannot be at least as zealous as the Communists are. But the question (which is usually rhetorical) is hardly a fair one, for, whereas Catholics represent a pretty typical cross-section of public life, the Communists are the tiny and fanatical minority among the millions whose 'philosophy' has been steadily sinking towards a nebulous materialism.

Furthermore, the feeling is common (however dimly felt) among working men students in Catholic study groups that there is something remote and rather impracticable about Catholic social teaching. And, indeed, Catholics at the moment do seem to be in a dilemma from which our present leaders in Catholic Social Action appear quite unable to rescue us. On the one hand (for reasons suggested above) the ordinary member of the public is impatient of any proposed solution for social evils which does not embody a simple and clear-cut social and economic programme, and Catholic social teaching embodies no such thing. On the other hand, however sincerely Catholics may agree as to fundamental socio-ethical principles, normally it does not seem possible to secure any general agreement as to form and technique when it comes to putting such principles into practice.

In Italy, it is true, the difficulty seems not to have proved insuperable (although it may still have to be faced), but there circumstances were hardly normal. Political parties had been so weakened as a result of a generation of Fascist rule that it was to be expected that the Catholic enemies of Communism would rally to the first reasonable alternative presented to them. But how different the situation has been in France! There, in spite of the strength of Communism, the followers of De Gaulle have made no secret of their contempt for M.R.P. during the period of its attempt to govern France. Under conditions of political democracy such a division of Catholic opinion could easily prove fatal because, even though every Catholic should make up his mind to use his vote against Communism, and even though the Communist support be that of a minority, yet Catholics may neutralise each other's vote by voting in different directions, thus giving the Communists their chance. (This is, of course, an oversimplification so far as France is concerned. There are other elements in the French situation.)

This sort of thing seems to give substance to the common lament that, whereas the Communists have a perfect understanding as to 'where they are going', Catholics never seem 'to get anywhere'. Is there, then, a way out of this 'Catholic dilemma'? At first glance the answer would seem to be negative. There has been, throughout the centuries, a vast amount of Catholic writings on social philosophy and they are certainly bound together by agreement as to principles. But there has also been a vast amount of disagreement as to the best manner of their application. Nor is such agreement to be expected in any society of free men, for true freedom lies in the ability to choose and act freely within the limits of God's

commandments as made known by the Natural Law and Revelation. It is true that acting outside these limits shows not freedom but licence; it is also true that lack of opportunity to act freely within them indicates that mental slavery which is an essential condition for the erection of a successful totalitarian system. Furthermore, it has been made quite clear by the Church that she does not officially support or oppose any particular social or economic form (or bind Catholics to do so). Neither does she seek to set up any such form of her own.

Nevertheless, when Communism or any such evil menaces Catholic life, unity among Catholics becomes both possible and essential. The form under which such unity may manifest itself will depend upon the nature of the danger to be faced. Thus if the Communists are politically strong and are opposed by only a number of comparatively weak and mutually antagonistic political parties, and if a sufficiently large portion of the population is Catholic, it will be necessary to form a new political party based upon the Natural Moral Law. When our Catholic leaders have done this it will become the duty of Catholics to support this party in defence of their Faith, even though to some it may appear to satisfy Catholic ideals in the social sphere only in a very limited manner. Moreover, if under such circumstances more than one 'Catholic' party should appear, it seems obvious that the leaders of these parties are bound to sink their differences for the time being at least and make common cause against the enemy of the Faith. Indeed, if sweet reason may not prevail, it would be better to decide by the tossing of a coin rather than allow disunity. After all, as most thinking people must realise when they go to vote, the most that political democracy can offer is often the choice of a lesser evil.

In this country the matter is more complicated. There are two dangers to the Faith and indeed to our whole Christian tradition. In the first place, there is the danger from Communism proper and at present this is probably the lesser one. The Communists here have little prospect of gaining any political power through the elections and for this reason (as is now well known) the small Communist minority have sought to obtain power by infiltrating into most branches of public life. Here the remedy is clear. We have sufficient men of the right calibre to be able to neutralise the influence of these Communists. Such men require to be chosen and trained for their task carefully and a considerable amount in this direction is being done—especially in the field of Trade Unionism. One word of warning is, however, necessary. There is evidence of a growing belief in certain quarters that Catholic action in the

Trade Unions merely represents the attempt of another minority to seize power. It should, therefore, be made clear to non-Catholics that the business of Catholics in Trade Unionism is to act as good Trade Unionists and that if they seek to draw men to their point of view, they do so by reason and example, also that there is no such thing as a Catholic plan to seize power in this country or in any branch of public life, by infiltration or by any other means.

The second danger is more serious, because it is more subtle. At the present time Catholics may be, and are, members of either of the two great political parties. Indeed, the activity of Catholics in these political spheres is not merely permissible; it is highly desirable. Yet it cannot be maintained that the programmes and intentions of either of these parties are running constantly in line with Catholic social teaching. Moreover, it is by no means impossible that both parties may, in the none too distant future, become entirely unacceptable to Catholics. For example, it is possible that the Labour Party may carry nationalisation projects to such an extent that they may become totally inconsistent with Catholic teaching regarding private property. Again, if the Conservative Party should gain power it is possible that the growth of monopoly and the further concentration of wealth will be equally destructive of the exercise of man's natural right to acquire property. At the present time, the duty of Catholics is to endeavour, by working within the political parties, to prevent their going outside the framework of natural justice. Here, perhaps, is an opportunity to strike a blow at Catholic apathy, by teaching how Catholic social principles may be applied inside any political party not fundamentally opposed to God's law.

And what if, in spite of such endeavours, these political parties should become totally unacceptable to Catholics? Here again the formation of a new party will be necessary, but not the formation of a 'Catholic' party. Such a party would be ineffective in this country. The new party would have to be on a wide basis and have a wide appeal but, in so far as Catholic teaching is an expression of the Natural Law which is applicable to all men, there is no reason why such a party should not embrace at least Christians of many different denominations.

It might be argued that if we delay forming a new party until it has become quite clear that the present parties have become totally opposed to the Christian tradition, we may delay too long. On the other hand, if we form a new party just now we are in danger of splitting Christian forces still further. I suggest that a non-political Christian organisation for the reform of the social

order might be formed which meantime would seek to inculcate the Christian outlook in different branches of public life and which could act as the nucleus of the new party, if and when the need for such a party should arise.

It cannot, however, be expected that political and economic unity among Catholics should have other than a provisional and temporary character or that such unity would persist after the removal of the danger of external attack on the Faith. The ethical basis for a Christian social structure is a wide one and the variety of political-economic systems which might be erected on this basis is great. The Church holds out no promise of a temporal Utopia. Neither does she promise an end to the conflict of minds. But she does give us the framework within which we must remain if we are to lead full Christian lives and so fulfil the end for which we were made.

JAMES SCALLY

## CATHOLIC SOCIAL ACTION

### A BRAZILIAN CONFERENCE

**T**HE Third Inter-American Conference of Catholic Social Action was opened at Rio de Janeiro on 22 August by His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop, Dom Jaime de Barros Camara, in the presence of delegates from twenty-one countries of the western hemisphere, including Canada and British Guiana. Representatives of several national and international organisations in Europe and North America attended the meetings in the quality of observers. Among these were the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, and the International Christian Social Association of Switzerland.

After referring briefly to the earlier meetings, held at Washington in 1942 and Havana in 1946, the leader of the American delegation, Bishop D. Karl Alter, of Toledo, Ohio, explained the objects of the present conference. These may be summed up as follows: 'To study the social problems common to all countries of the American continent, and apply to them in a practical manner the principles of social justice, as set forth in the Encyclicals of Popes Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII'.

The first day's discussions were almost exclusively occupied with the situation in rural districts, where primitive conditions and a low standard of health call for action in the majority of Latin-American countries. Attention was directed especially to the asphyxiating effect of the big estates, relics of colonial times, which stifle initiative, restrict agricultural development and maintain the