

Introduction to Social Justice
By Rev. William J. Ferree, S.M., Ph.D.
Foreword by Norman G. Kurland, J.D.
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FOREWORD

by Norman G. Kurland, President
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It is my great pleasure, as well as a small down payment on a debt of gratitude, to present this pamphlet to you. It was written by my good friend, and fellow-laborer in the field of Social Justice, the late Father William J. Ferree, S.M., Ph.D. Do not be misled, however. We at the ecumenical Center for Economic and Social Justice (CESJ), in collaboration with the Social Justice Review, do not republish this short work simply as a museum piece to memorialize a great thinker. It is an important exposition of fundamental ideas in the area of Social Justice which have largely been ignored by social movements which confuse justice with charity. This confusion has helped weaken the status, power, and economic security of the person and the well-being of the family within the modern world.

What makes this pamphlet so critical is that it offers common-sense guidelines on how to solve seemingly overwhelming social and cultural problems, problems which no individual realistically can overcome on his or her own. After reading this practical handbook for social change, we may no longer hide our heads in the sand with the excuse that "the system can't be changed." Father Ferree has shown here how each of us can do something to correct the system.

This booklet was written by Father Ferree in 1948. It served as a condensation of; introduction to, and popularization of his pivotal *The Act of Social Justice*. This was a scholarly and in-depth examination of the specific virtue of Social Justice and the "act" of that virtue as defined and developed by Pope Pius XI. Social Justice, according to Father Ferree, is one of the virtues in a major advance in moral philosophy becoming known as "social morality."

Social morality deals with the duty which each of us is personally obliged to perform in caring for the common good.

The "common good," as Father Ferree defined it, is the network of customs, laws, social organizations -- i.e., our "institutions" -- that make up the social order and largely determine the quality of our culture. Institutions influence how people interact with one another as social beings within an organized setting, not just as isolated individuals. The common good of any institution, Ferree observed, "is something which each of us possesses in its entirety, like light, or life itself" (p.32 herein).

As Pius XI and Father Ferree pointed out, the "act" of Social Justice is whatever is done in association with others to restructure our institutions and laws to advance the perfection of every

person and family affected by that institution. How well we advance Social Justice in turn can be measured for each institution in terms of that institution's success in elevating the dignity, status, power, and well-being of every participating person and family. The wider the gap in opportunities and power between those at the top and those at the bottom, the greater is our personal responsibility to engage in acts of Social Justice. We can only close that opportunity and power gap by restructuring the institutions in which we work and live, reforming the laws which shape our social interactions.

In his book *Utopia or Oblivion*, R. Buckminster Fuller, one of America's most revolutionary thinkers on technological change, pointed out that in order for "humanity's original, innate capabilities to become successful," an adequately organized environment is necessary.² Fuller's prophetic call for a "design science revolution" was concentrating almost exclusively on the redesign of our physical environment. The most challenging problems facing society, however, are not in our physical sciences, technologies, and surroundings. Aside from violations of individual virtue, our most serious social problems can be traced to the growing gap between our technological environment and our institutional environment.

The first environment we can see or feel; it changes with scientific discoveries and the invention of more efficient technologies. The second environment consists of "invisible structures" (i.e., laws, constitutions, tax and central banking systems, management systems, and other social institutions), things we cannot see or feel -- things which, in Fuller's words, must also be "adequately organized."

This invisible part of our cultural environment -- our "social architecture" -- improves with our understanding and application of core values and fundamental principles, especially universal principles of social and economic justice. The design quality (from both a justice and efficiency standpoint) of our laws and social institutions determines the quality of how people "relate" to each other, to their physical environment, and to the process of technological change. It determines whether those relationships bring harmony or conflict, abundance or waste, human development or degradation, a culture of life or a culture of death.

This unseen cultural environment reflects our ultimate spiritual and moral values and defines the quality of our daily lives, even more than the tools we use or the physical structures that surround us. Like human nature, ultimate values and inalienable human rights do not change as science and technology advance. Unless fundamental values and respect for human dignity are preserved, however, as we restructure our institutions to accommodate to technological change, the fabric of our value systems deteriorates. Social institutions then become social barriers, even threats, to growing numbers of people.

The deterioration of our moral framework and the emergence of social barriers to individual fulfillment lead inevitably to what social scientists call "alienation." These artificial barriers deprive people of equal opportunity and the means to control their own destinies, and thus reinforce injustices and divisions in society.

Consequently, the faster technology progresses, the faster people can become separated from their technological environment. By blocking people from reaching their fullest human potential and gaining power over their own lives, institutional barriers impede those individuals from working effectively with others for the common good. These barriers discourage people from assuming personal responsibility for their own moral behavior. Therefore, everyone loses from this waste of creativity and erosion of the moral order.

Lifting these social barriers means correcting the faulty ideas, confused value systems and outdated institutional structures upon which they rest. Ultimately, real solutions depend on new ideas that better reflect fundamental values.

CESJ has a vested interest in this new edition of Introduction to Social Justice. It prepares the socially concerned reader for CESJ's most important publication to date, *Curing World Poverty: The New Role of Property*.³ Reading *Curing World Poverty*, one might shrug it aside with the response, "It sounds good, but what can I, a lone individual, do to bring about such fundamental changes in the structuring of the economic order?"

The answer is found in this pamphlet. Indeed, the lone individual is helpless to change the social order. This reality, not surprisingly, is the cause of great frustration in those who attempt to act justly within flawed or unjust institutions. Some become so frustrated that they lash out at structures of injustice, trying to pull down these imperfect social institutions rather than transform them into structures of justice.

However, in the realm of Social Justice, as Father Ferree points out, nothing is impossible. What has been made by people can be remade by people. The lone individual is helpless only if he

refuses to join with others to carry out acts of Social Justice. Father Ferree makes it clear that it is unnecessary -- even wrong and perhaps sinful -- to do nothing and wait for the state to take action and correct the flaws in the common good. Relegating Social Justice to a function of the state leads to an abrogation of the responsibility of every person to act in a socially just manner and organize with others to correct defects in the social order.

This is not to say that there isn't an active role for the state to play, particularly in our economic and social lives. But there are essentially two different ways to look at the role of the state -- civilization's only legitimate monopoly. These contrasting orientations may best be illustrated by the ideas of two radically opposed thinkers in the field of political science, Robert Cardinal Bellarmine (1542-1621), and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679).

On the one hand, we have Hobbes' political philosophy which declares, essentially, that man was made for the state, not the state for man. This view is brilliantly expounded in Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* (completed sometime before Filmer's death in 1653, but not published until 1680), and most popularly in Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651). The Hobbesian position leads to the notion that the state is far more important than the individual or the family, the most basic social unit.

On the other hand, we have Bellarmine's political philosophy which declares that the state was made by and for man as a necessary social tool to enable him to live in harmony and order with his fellow human beings.⁴ This concept of the sovereignty of the people was so well expounded by Cardinal Bellarmine in order to counter the then-newly developed theory of the "divine right of kings" that it called forth numerous attacks from the promoters of statist absolutism, most notably Filmer and Hobbes. The Bellarmine or "democratic" version of the sovereignty of the people was based soundly in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, which implied that the care of the common good was not just the province of the state through the ruler, but the responsibility of everyone. Aquinas maintained that the common good could be affected directly by acts of Legal Justice carried out by anyone, not only the state, the ruler, or some tiny elite of aristocrats or plutocrats.

Despite Aquinas' conceptual advances, there is a tendency by many social activists to focus exclusively on a statist concept of Legal Justice. This leads inevitably to totalitarianism and socialism -- systems which glorify, if not deify -- the state and seek to control man and the smaller units of society for the good of the whole. Statist systems sacrifice the sovereignty of the person and of the people to a collectivist version of the common good in order to bring about desired ends, generally some form of "equality of results." The collectivist version of equality is superficially attractive. The goal of equality has a certain universal moral ring to it. Yet we are reminded by Alexis de Tocqueville, the astute commentator on Jacksonian America, of two diametrically opposed versions of equality. After observing American democracy in action, de Tocqueville warned us:

The nations of our time cannot prevent the conditions of men from becoming equal, but it depends upon themselves whether the principle of equality is to lead them to servitude or freedom, to knowledge or barbarism, to prosperity or wretchedness. 5

The Thomistic concept of Legal Justice leads to a respect for the dignity of the human person through the realization that the common good must be fully and directly accessible by everyone. Ultimately, the modern welfare state orientation is toward equality of results, while the Thomistic orientation is toward equality of opportunity. The former employs coercion, creates barriers to human development, and limits creativity and initiative; the latter persuades through reason, lifts barriers to human empowerment, and encourages creativity and initiative.

In this booklet, Father Ferree gives a brief synopsis of his painstaking research into the Thomistic concept of Legal Justice, as more fully developed by Pius XI into the doctrine of Social Justice. Ferree begins with Aristotle's concept of Legal Justice and the act of that virtue. Legal Justice, according to Aristotle, is carried out by the state in enacting laws; people conform to that virtue simply by obeying the law. Ferree then traces Aquinas' correction and expansion of Aristotle's thought into a concept that adds the idea of the common good to the definition of Legal Justice. This broader understanding, according to Ferree, laid the foundation for Pius XI's concept of Social Justice.

Finally, Ferree identifies and explains Pius XI's fundamentally new contribution to the debate over the precise meaning of Social Justice and its consequent act. This contribution consisted of Pius XI's insights into the nature and function of institutions as essential components of the common good, and how the "institutional" (i.e., social) virtues were fundamentally different from the individual virtues. Ferree does not "leave us hanging" and wondering what to do with these revolutionary insights, however. After having illuminated the profound and innovative teachings of Pius XI, he describes how each of us can engage in acts of Social Justice, and explains why it is absolutely critical that we do so.

Today many people confuse Social Justice with individualistic or governmental actions that attack only the symptoms of social disorder and breakdown. They miss the structural root causes and institutional defects underlying social ills such as homelessness, hunger, and mass unemployment. Many even assume that only the state can remedy these symptoms, generally through income redistribution and interferences with supply and demand and other natural laws.

In contrast, Pius XI teaches that everyone--not just the ruler--has direct responsibility for the common good, and for working with and through others to restructure defective or unjust economic and social institutions. In caring for the common good, we are also reminded, special concern and protection must always be given to the most powerless and dependent persons in society (including the unborn) and the most basic unit of society (the family). We effectively provide a "preferential option for the poor"--a major directive of Social Justice--by equalizing opportunity and the means to participate fully both as an owner and as a worker for those most marginalized by the modern world.

How does this relate to the real world? Consider three recent popular movements which embodied acts of Social Justice--the "one person-one vote" civil rights movement which helped end racial segregation in the United States, the anti-apartheid revolution in South Africa, and the collapse of established communism in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (particularly in Poland with the Solidarity movement). All of these social movements involved individuals organizing with others for the common good, working for universal human rights and in

accordance with fundamental principles. Committed people engaged in acts of Social Justice and achieved the goal of political democracy that many thought was unattainable. The end of segregation in the United States, we may recall, was expected to take two centuries; apartheid was accepted by many as the natural way of life in South Africa; and the monolithic statist totalitarianism of the Soviet Union was considered invincible and eternal.

Yet each of these three movements, which brought widespread access to the political ballot and representative government, suffered from a moral omission. They failed to build a foundation for an effective economic democracy upon which political democracy ultimately rests. This omission has led, in some respects, to a partial reversal (which could become complete) of what has been attained. We see today where a type of economic "self-segregation" is being advocated in some quarters of the African American community. The growing gap between haves and have-nots in South Africa (perceived by many to be along color lines) may soon stir calls for a vengeful "justice." And, after over fifty years of struggle against it, communism is being voted back into power in many formerly socialist countries out of disenchantment with what some people call democratic capitalism.⁶

What was (and still is) needed to reinforce the morally sound political and social objectives of these three movements was a morally sound economic program. An effective economic democracy based on widespread individual ownership of the means of production would counter the essentially plutocratic nature of capitalism and socialism, and establish a sound basis for the protection of basic human rights and dignity. As William Cobbett, an early 19th century social commentator, noted:

Freedom is not an empty sound; it is not an abstract idea; it is not a thing that nobody can feel. It means--and it means nothing else--the full and quiet enjoyment of your own property. If you have not this, if this be not well secured to you, you may call yourself what you will, but you are a slave.⁷

Yet, in spite of their obvious flaws, these three success stories should be examples for how people in one of the most vilified and hated human rights movements--Pro-Life--can organize and carry out acts of Social Justice. Indeed, the Pro-Life movement must go beyond what was accomplished, and add in what the human rights revolution missed: an economic agenda to support the political and social rights sought for the disenfranchised.

As mentioned above, Introduction to Social Justice was written in 1948, over a third of a century before Father Ferree co-founded the Center for Economic and Social Justice in 1984. This was scarcely over a year before his--to us--untimely death. It was not until this "eleventh hour" that he was introduced to the ideas of economic justice found in the classic works of Louis O. Kelso, most notably in the misnamed *The Capitalist Manifesto*,⁸ which Kelso wrote in 1958 with Mortimer J. Adler, the Aristotelian philosopher. Just as Pius XI had developed the concept of Legal Justice from that of Aquinas (which Aquinas had developed from Aristotle), Kelso and Adler applied the distributive justice principles of Aristotle within a modern free market context, and developed the concept of participative justice from the tiny embryo implicit in the *Politics* and *Nichomachean Ethics*.

The principles underlying participative justice require that everyone have the right to participate in the fullness of the common good, particularly (from Kelso's point of view) in the institutions which determine access to ownership of advanced technology--most significantly, productive or "self-liquidating" credit. According to Kelso, true distributive justice follows participative justice. In today's high-technology environment and competitive global marketplace, economic participation in the common good should not--and cannot--be limited solely to a wage system job.

Like Aristotle, Kelso posits that justice in distribution is based on each person's contributions to production, not on the basis of his needs. According to Kelso, the notion of "to each according to his needs" is the distributive principle that is valid only for acts of charity. To be socially just, the opportunity and social means to own a sufficient amount of, and derive a viable level of income from, productive assets cannot be denied to anyone. As George Mason stated in Section One of the Virginia Declaration of Rights of June 12, 1776:

all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.
[emphasis added]⁹

From Ferree, then, we can see how: through acts of Social Justice.¹⁰ From Kelso, we can see what: participative justice by lifting barriers that prevent any person from "acquiring and possessing property" in the economic goods of society. That leaves us with why. "Why" as well as "what" is answered in both the title and the text of *Curing World Poverty: The New Role of Property*.

Read Father Ferree's short pamphlet to understand why no one is permitted any longer to wring his hands and wail ineffectually about socially unjust conditions; read to understand how effective acts of Social Justice can be organized and carried out; read to understand how to orient yourself to act in a socially just manner with and through others. Then read *Curing World Poverty* to find out what specific acts of Social Justice must be carried out to correct economically unjust conditions.

One seemingly unjust condition is when wages are paid to workers at a level insufficient to raise a family in decent comfort and security. For many people, the obvious remedy under Social Justice is to provide a "living wage." Even Father Ferree, who corrects this misunderstanding in Chapter 2 of *Introduction to Social Justice*, appears to justify the payment of a "living" or "family" wage under "commutative or strict justice." The reader of this pamphlet would be absolutely correct in noting that the living or family wage notion (based on the "need" rather than the "contribution" principle) directly contradicts Louis Kelso's concept of a market-determined "just" wage.

As explained in *Curing World Poverty* and other publications of the Center for Economic and Social Justice, Kelso views the just wage (due under commutative justice) as only one component of a living income. Social Justice, according to the Kelsonian perspective, demands

the reordering of our social institutions to provide every person with equal access to the means of acquiring and possessing sufficient income-generating capital to supplement a market-determined labor income.

Was Father Ferree actually violating his own principles and those set out by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* by restricting the general means of gaining income to wages paid for the sale of labor? This pamphlet was, after all, written prior to his involvement with CESJ and its emphasis on the Kelso-Adler theory of economic justice.¹¹ No, Father Ferree was not stating that the living wage is the end of Social Justice. Ferree would say that the end of Social Justice is the restructuring of institutions to support the dignity and sovereignty of each human person--something which CESJ would argue is impossible in the modern wage system.

Social Justice requires that the institutions of society be examined and corrected as world civilization is altered by technological change, manifesting discoveries and inventions by many creative individuals over the centuries. As so many have discovered, focusing on the living wage, in today's world of labor-displacing robotics and computer chips, is ultimately a blind alley. Viewing wages as the sole legitimate (or mandated) means of earning a living in a high-tech global marketplace, limits most people's incomes to only one mechanism of distribution--property in one's own labor--and de-legitimizes incomes from another, perhaps more economically vital, mechanism of distribution--property in one's own equity stake in the world's growing technological frontier.

Simply raising or lowering wages in violation of the principles of a just market economy changes the unjust wage system only in degree, not in kind. The living or family wage does not address qualitatively the problem of inadequate and insecure income. It is a political expedient that does nothing to change how income is earned, merely focusing on the amount that is distributed, with no recognition that the mechanism of wages is by itself insufficient. The wage system--by its failure to connect workers directly with income-producing capital assets needed for growth of the economy--leaves workers vulnerable to technological change and increasingly dependent on the voluntary charity of people of good will or on the "coerced charity" of the modern welfare state.

Properly understood, the living or family wage is something that is tolerated out of economic necessity, not the exercise of justice based on fundamental rights. In this, the rationale for the wage system--which is the common denominator for every economy on the globe--resembles the justification of human chattel slavery found in David Christy's *Cotton is King* (1856) The premise of this book was that slavery was the motivating force behind the prosperity of the United States and Great Britain, and was necessary in order to ensure the continuation of that prosperity.

The living or family wage is flawed in its essential principles. This was recognized even by one of the foremost proponents of the living wage, Father John A. Ryan, in the early part of this century: "The right to a Living Wage is evidently a derived right which is measured and determined by existing social and industrial institutions."¹² Pius XI clearly favored structural and institutional changes to lift workers from dependency on the wage system, changes that would enable workers to supplement their wages, meet their family needs, and become economically

liberated through sharing in ownership and profits. This is clear from the placement of critical sections concerning worker ownership in *Quadragesimo Anno*, which are given priority over the discussion on the family wage.¹³ For some reason, however, Father Ferree did not refer to these sections, in spite of the obvious importance placed on them by Pius XI, giving the erroneous impression to the superficial reader that he was advocating the standard living wage argument.¹⁴

Widespread ownership of productive assets is becoming an increasingly vital issue. Obviously, where workers have nothing but their labor to sell in an increasingly globalized marketplace, and where advancing technology continues to displace even the most sophisticated forms of labor in the productive process, wages are no longer the most appropriate or secure way to earn a living. What should be the primary means of gaining an independent and adequate family income was articulated by Pius XII, in his 1942 Christmas Broadcast, *The Rights of Man*:

Therefore the dignity of the human person normally demands the right to the use of earthly goods as the natural foundation for a livelihood; and to that right corresponds the fundamental obligation to grant private property, as far as possible, to all. The positive laws regulating private property may change and may grant a more or less restricted use of it; but if such legal provisions are to contribute to the peaceful state of the community, they must save the worker, who is or will be the father of a family, from being condemned to an economic dependence or slavery irreconcilable with his rights as a person.¹⁵

That, in essence, is the message of CESJ. Human dignity requires a recognition and protection of the economic sovereignty of each person, as the material basis for his social, political, and spiritual sovereignty. Economic sovereignty may best be realized and protected through widespread individual access to the institution of private property, particularly in ownership and control over advanced instruments of production (including the business corporation). Once ownership and profit sharing are accessible to all--thus supplementing or, in some instances, replacing wages--the "just wage" will be more clearly understood as one that can and should be decided by the forces of supply and demand, rather than by an elite, by fiat, by coercion, or even by the will of a political majority. True, the market system by itself is morally insufficient and imperfect as a means for diffusing ownership. But the free and open market, when reinforced by broadened ownership, remains a fundamental pillar of a just economy and the most objective and democratic way to determine economic values.

My only regret in introducing this booklet to you is that, unlike you, I cannot have the pleasure of reading it for the first time. It is a difficult, but rewarding task. Why difficult? There are, after all, only a few pages to read.

It is difficult because it challenges you to step outside your accepted patterns of thought. A socialist, for example, may think that capitalism is being advocated. A capitalist may find himself thinking that this fellow Ferree must have been a socialist. Both would be wrong. Father Ferree gives us the tools we need to find another way, a third way that leaves behind the greed of capitalism and the envy of socialism, a third way that is socially just and within the reach of everyone through acts of Social Justice carried out in association with others.

1. Rev. William J Ferree, *The Act of Social Justice*. Washington, D.C. The Catholic University of America Press, 1942.
2. R. Buckminster Fuller, *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity*. New York Bantam Books, 1969, p 320.
3. Rev. John H Miller, C.S.C, S.T.D., ed., *Curing World Poverty: The New Role of Property*. St. Louis, Missouri: Social Justice Review, 1994.
4. See John Clement Rager, S.T.D., *The Political Philosophy of St Robert Bellarmine*. Spokane, Washington: Apostolate of Our Lady of Siluva, 1995, pp 84-85.
5. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. New York Alfred A Knopf, 1994, Vol. II, p.334.

⁶See, e. g. , Michael Novice, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*. New York: Touchstone, 1982, and other works by 'be same author.

7. William Cobbett, *A History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland*, 1827, § 456

8. Louis O Kelso and Mortimer Adler; *The Capitalist Manifesto*. New York: Random House, 1958.

9. George Mason's document, along with the subsequent Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776, was heavily influenced by the theories and teachings of Cardinal Bellarmine (See Rager; op cit.)

¹⁰For strategic and tactical guidelines for anyone committed to transforming basic economic institutions, see this author's 1972 paper, *How to Win a Revolution And Enjoy It*, republished as an occasional paper by The Center for Economic and Social Justice, Arlington, Virginia, 1989.

11. See Chapters 3 and 4 of *Curing World Poverty*.

12John A. Ryan, S.T.D., *A Living Wage: Its Ethical and Economic Aspects*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Publishers, 1906, p. 68.

13Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, §§ 56-65.

14Unfortunately Father Ferree wrote in 1948, prior to his exposure to the Kelsonian paradigm, and gave limited attention to expanded ownership approaches to meeting family needs.

15. Pius XI, *The Rights of Man*, Christmas Broadcast, 1942, §II

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

By Rev. William J. Ferree, S.M., Ph.D.

Preface

The most important thing to note about this pamphlet is that it is only an introduction to the subject which it treats. As an introduction, one of its functions is to attract attention to a subject not too widely studied or understood. To do this, it will deliberately emphasize only new and neglected aspects of the truth.

This deliberate emphasis on the unusual, however, should not blind readers to the fact that whatever was true in the past is just as true in the present. In insisting, as this pamphlet must insist, on the social nature and activity of man, there is no intention of denying in any way his individual nature and activity. It is only that this latter aspect of human nature is not the subject of this pamphlet.

Confirmed individualists will not like what they read in these pages. They will feel that their most cherished principles are being denied at every step of the way. The sole purpose of this preface is to point out to them, from the very beginning, that their truths of the individual order are not being denied—they are being completed.

CHAPTER I

The Work of Pope Pius XI

A Great Social Thinker

Pope Pius XI was one of the greatest social thinkers of modern times, or, for that matter, of any time. One of his greatest contributions to social thought was his doctrine of Social Justice as explained in his encyclicals *Quadragesimo Anno* and *Divini Redemptoris*.

What he did in these Encyclicals was to complete an essential chapter of moral philosophy which had lain undeveloped, and largely neglected, from the very dawn of philosophy. This "unfinished chapter" has become steadily more important in modern times because it forms the missing link between moral philosophy on one hand, and the vast modern development which is known as "Scientific Sociology" on the other.

The great struggle has raged over the radical instability of social phenomena. The fact-biased Sociologist saw this instability very clearly; and concluded very early in his science that he would have to discard all "immutable" principles to make room for it; while the principle-conscious moralist, faced with so devastating a conclusion, resisted to the point of ignoring, or actually fearing, the facts.

It is not surprising, therefore, that "Scientific Sociology" has been so intensely secularistic and even materialistic throughout its whole development--neither the sociologists nor the moralists have been able to see very clearly how their sciences could be reduced to unity, or even to compromise.

The problem was to put forward a theory of society which explained satisfactorily the countless fundamental changes of social organization which history reveals; and still be able to maintain, amidst this incessant and radical change, the unchanging rule of law.

The Radical Instability of Human Affairs

First, let us see what Pope Pius XI has to say about the radical instability of human society. The best statement of his views is to be found in a discourse delivered on May 15, 1926, to a group which had been commemorating the thirty-fifth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ("On the Condition of the Working Classes"). This discourse is in the direct line of Pope Pius XI's own great Encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, which was written just five years later, on the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. As a matter of fact, the discourse is quoted (at Paragraph 49) in *Quadragesimo Anno*, and the reference given; so that it is obvious that it should be studied with the latter document.

The importance of the Discourse is further emphasized by the Holy Father's statement at the beginning that it resulted from some sort of divine inspiration.

The Holy Father thinks himself in conscience bound to these dear sons who have come here in the expectation of some direction relative to their role as leaders of Catholic Action. That is why he will tell them in all confidence what the Lord inspired him to say at the moment when, kneeling before Him, he had repeated the beautiful prayer of St. Thomas: *Da mihi, Domine, sedium tuarum assistricem sapientiam...*

The first reflection bears upon the instability of human affairs, and not only of the minor ones, but also of the great; not only of those which are contingent circumstances of social life, but also those which seem bound up with the very substance of things, and which we are not in the habit of conceiving in any other way than as unchangeable.

There is an instability from which no single thing can escape, for that, precisely, is the essence of created things: they have not in themselves the reason for their own being. Thus it happens that even for the greatest things, for those that are closest to the substance of certain institutions, instability is possible, and sometimes inevitable—and it is even, in fact, commonplace, especially if we do not stop at the consideration of each fact in particular, but extend our view to the great considerations of history and of the road traveled by the human race.

The fact is that precisely in those social elements which seem fundamental, and most exempt from change, such as property, capital, labor, a constant change.. is not only possible, but is real, and an accomplished fact. It suffices to examine the course of history.

Of course, the fundamental principle: "Thou shalt not steal," remains immutable, and in disregard of it there is only violation of the divine precept. But what divers concrete forms property has had, from that primitive form among rude and savage peoples, which may be observed in some places even in our own day, to the form of possessions in the Patriarchal Age, and so further to the various forms under Tyranny (We are using the word "Tyranny" in its classical sense); and then through the feudal and, later, monarchical forms, to the various types that are to be found in more recent times! How many and how different attitudes in what concerns not only the great collectivities, but even the family, and individuals!

Most of the last paragraph above is quoted in *Quadragesimo Anno*. It will be noticed that besides indicating profound changes in the concept and fact of property throughout the ages, this passage also indicates, as the Pope himself is careful to point out in the last sentence, equally fundamental changes in the forms and ideas of the State and of the family, as well as in the norms and limits of individual action. The quotation continues:

It is the same with labor. From the primitive work of the man of the stone age, to the great organization of production of our day, how many transitions, ascensions, complications, diversities!...

What an enormous difference! It is therefore necessary to take such changes into account, and to prepare oneself, by an enlightened foresight and with complete resignation, to this instability of things and of human institutions, which are not all perfect, but necessarily imperfect and susceptible of changes....

The most pragmatist of the modern "Scientific Sociologists" could not surpass this statement of the radical instability "even of those great institutions which seem bound up with the very substance of things, and which we are not in the habit of conceiving in any other way than as unchangeable." The Pope could venture so boldly into this "no-man's-land" between the moralists and the sociologists because he knew that he had already found the answer to the unsolved problem of both sides: how to maintain the reign of unchanging law if it is once admitted that the "very substance of things" is subject to change.

A Philosophical Detective Story

The principles which he had already clarified in his own mind, and intended to apply to the rapidly changing drama of modern history, were Social Justice and Social Charity. In this view, all society is simply a habitual organization (technically: an "institution") of human actions; which is in constant and necessary flux precisely because it is an organization of action, but which at the same time is kept constantly--we could even say unchangeably—organized for the same end, human and Christian perfection, by the Laws of Social Justice and Social Charity.

Pope Pius XI seems to have invented the very term "Social Charity" himself; but he picked up the term "Social Justice" from a growing popular usage which began about 1850. Before 1850, "Legal Justice" or "General Justice" were the only terms used to designate what we now call "Social Justice."

The history of "Legal Justice" had been a long and none too happy one; and when Pope Pius XI finally wrote the last chapter, he solved a philosophical "mystery story" whose solution had eluded the world's best thinkers from Aristotle on down.

The Story: Aristotle

It was in the Fourth Century B.C. that the story began. Then Aristotle discussed "Legal Justice"--and probably invented the term--in the Fifth Book of his Ethics; but he left the idea fuzzy and anemic. For him it wasn't a special virtue at all, but rather a name for all virtues insofar as the law required their practice. It offered little help towards building a good society beyond the rather obvious information that law-abiding people made better citizens than gangsters.

Fifteen Centuries Later

There the matter stood until the greatest thinker of the Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas, took the idea up and made something of it. What he did was to redefine it as a special virtue which has the Common Good for its direct object. Of course, the common good of society is so all-embracing that every act of virtue done by the members of society will contribute something to it. In this "indirect" way, Aristotle was right. That was why Legal Justice, whose direct object is the Common Good, was also called "general justice":--for the sake of that Common Good it could also (i.e., "indirectly") demand acts of every other virtue. Thus, in defense of the Common Good of a country, it could demand bravery ("fortitude") from a soldier. In this example the soldier's virtue is not only that of fortitude (facing death bravely), but also that of Social Justice (defense of the Common Good); and every other virtue whatever could also become an act of Social Justice in the same way, i.e., by being done for the Common Good.

This is a great improvement over Aristotle's imperfect notion, but it still leaves a tremendous question unanswered: If this Social Justice is now really a special virtue, does it have any special and direct acts of its own? It is easy to see how acts of the other virtues could all give the Common Good a "lift" once this Common Good is already a "going concern"; but is there an act of this special virtue which directly "makes" the Common Good--starts it off and builds it up, or rebuilds it if it happens to be destroyed?

The Suspense Drags On

Much as he did for Social Justice, St. Thomas, did not ask or answer this crucial question, and for over seven hundred years after him, few philosophers asked it and none gave the answer. Of those few who did ask it, some denied that the question was a good one, and the rest said, No! In fact, one of the most recent of these, actually commenting on Pope Pius XI's teaching, was so blinded by his own training that he could not see what the Pope was driving at, and ended his discussion of Social Justice with the awful statement: "The Common Good is not an object which can be directly attained." when it is remembered that the Common Good is the greatest of natural goods, that only under its sway can individual goods be attained or retained, that without it each individual's share of personal perfection is either limited or destroyed, one can begin to

realize what a mess society would be in if that statement were true! It may even be that the status quo ("Latin," as someone said, "for the mess we are in!") results, as much as anything, from our widespread belief that it was true.

The best that the social philosophers of the past could manage was to teach that in every action Social Justice required "a good intention" for the Common Good. But how uncertain this "good intention" is when not backed up by a complete theory of Social Justice can be seen from the fact that the high-priest of unrestrained individualism, Adam Smith, appealed to it constantly to justify his destructive theories! Few books profess devotion to the Common Good more often or more insistently than his *Wealth of Nations*.

It was left for Pope Pius XI to put the question clearly and accurately--after twenty-three centuries!--and to answer it right.