

## INDUSTRIAL PROBLEMS IN A DEMOCRACY

### I.

THE seminar—as was to be expected—failed to come to any definite conclusions about the moral theology of the specific case studies under consideration. This was probably all to the good, for our very failure to agree served to highlight the complexity of the problem and the consequent necessity of approaching it scientifically. All of the participants must have gone away more convinced than ever before that the moral theology of industrial relations is an infant science and that the moral theologian who would specialize in this phase of his profession must needs steep himself in the facts of economic and industrial life and in the history of industrial relations in the United States. Otherwise he will be applying his moral principles—incorrectly, as often as not—in a vacuum.

How to proceed to develop the moral theology of industrial relations? Cooperatively! Let the Catholic Theological Society appoint a committee of interested members to cooperate with a committee of trained labor economists. For what purpose? Initially, merely to survey the field and to outline the areas which are most in need of further study. Such a committee could perform a very useful service by publishing a memorandum or a series of memoranda indicating subjects to which graduate students of moral theology might profitably devote their full-time research. Progress will be slow, but gradually, over a period of years, such a committee could help to interest our theological schools in the problem. Until this is accomplished—until our theological schools at the graduate level come to look upon the morality of industrial relations as one of their principal interests—our people will continue to rely, as they have had to do in the past, on curbstone judgments.

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## II

THE actions of labor and management in the field of industrial relations are frequently born of deliberate choices. Such actions cannot, therefore, be morally indifferent. Not only do industrial problems implicate moral problems, but the type of moral problems which are involved are important and extensive. Mishandling of these moral problems and indifference to them can eventuate into a terrible punishment of the Christian world in the form of progress toward materialistic socialism and the defection of masses of workers and groups of employers from ethical and spiritual ideals.

Nevertheless, despite the importance of the problems involved, manuals of moral theology and moral theologians themselves have failed to develop on a systematic basis secondary and tertiary principles to constitute what Maritain has called a practically practical and speculatively practical treatment of the ethics of moral theology of labor relations.

A relatively few priests have made for themselves the opportunity to study the technical aspects of industrial relations. There has been no systematic casuistry to apply general principles of moral theology to the concrete circumstances of particular problems. We have permitted judges, labor lawyers, labor leaders and management spokesmen, by their decisions and speeches, to formulate a conflicting babel of theories of what is right and what is wrong in labor relations.

To remedy this neglect, Mr. Schmidt proposed that a group of moral theologians within the Catholic Theological Society study on a systematic basis the leading labor law cases with the idea of considering them, not as legal problems, but rather as cases of conscience. In this way, a body of secondary and tertiary principles and of applications could be developed within the area of moral theology. It is not enough that there be labor priests who sometimes substitute good-will and even benevolent partiality for scholarship and dispassionate science. The problem should be treated by moral theologians. What we need is a fundamental re-thinking of the common institutions and actualities in the field of labor relations from the point of view of moral theology. What precisely is the morality of the closed shop and of the union shop in various

circumstances? What precisely is the morality of the picket line in its various manifestations? Etc.

Such inquiries presuppose a careful and philosophic investigation of these institutions and practices. For example, what precisely is the rational content of a picket line? Is the picket line a frank appeal to class-consciousness? Is the picket line a full and intelligent presentation of one side of the controversy, so that he who witnesses the picket line is equipped to judge prudently the merits of the controversy? Is the picket line a mere appeal for sympathy for the underdogs? Is the picket line a technique used to prevent people from entering the premises of an employer by force if necessary, by means short of crime, but involving moral intimidation and coercion? Is the picket line a mere tactic to enlist sympathy truthfully or fraudulently, depending upon the exigencies of the case? Is the picket line in its many manifestations consistent with Christian charity? Does the picket line impose any obligations upon patrons or would-be patrons? Is a picket line, motivated by political considerations, moral? What about mass-picketing? What about the usual spectacle of insults and vituperations emanating from the picket line? Etc.

Then with respect to the closed shop, by way of further example, a host of problems are discernible. We would all reprobate the worker who, turning to his co-worker, would say: "I won't work with you because you are a Catholic," or "because you are a Jew." Is it morally permissible to do, as the closed shop technique implies, the same thing in a different context: "I won't work with you because you don't belong to my union (even though you might belong to another union)?" Does the right of free association imply the right not to join a particular labor organization? What precisely is the nature of the distinction which on the one hand condemns the yellow-dog contract and on the other hand approves the closed shop technique? If men cannot be coerced into joining the Roman Catholic Church, which is necessary to salvation, can they be morally coerced into joining a labor organization which is not necessary to salvation, either temporal or spiritual? Or, is there a moral obligation to join a labor union? If so, what is the nature and extent of this obligation?

These are only a few of the important questions which competent moral theologians have left out of their writings and apparently out of their meditations. If moral theologians, with their spiritual insight and their array of natural and supernatural principles, would study these problems assiduously and speak fearlessly on them, they will, of course, often disappoint both management and labor, but they would make both wiser, and in doing that they will improve the common good.

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