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...Pastoral Letter...



**RELATIONS BETWEEN
EMPLOYERS
— AND —
THE EMPLOYED**

William, Cardinal O'Connell
Archbishop of Boston



...Advent, 1912...

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William, Cardinal O'Connell
Archbishop of Boston



**To the Reverend Clergy, and People of the
Diocese, Health and Benediction.**

THE time of Advent set apart by the Church to prepare the minds of men for the coming of the Prince of Peace seems an appropriate one, venerable brethren of the clergy and laity, to open my pastoral heart to you on a subject vitally connected with your domestic, civil and spiritual peace.

The social problem of the relations between employers and employed appears to be the one most fraught with danger to our peaceful living. It has been many times in the past the source of widespread discord and disorder, and may in the future prove a danger to the public peace

unless some remedy can be found to better our social conditions. The hostile attitude of one set of men against another is always prejudicial to the permanence of peaceful relations; but when two classes are arrayed in antagonism and distrust, each against the other, the one with the resources of wealth and power behind it, the other with the force of numbers to make its influence felt, society is menaced by impending outbreaks, and the peace of families, the tranquillity of the State and the normal calm engendered by religion are imperilled.

To find a way out of these social dangers, to reconcile conflicting interests, to lay down a basis for the just and equitable settlement of differences between employers and workers is a call to an apostolate of the highest service, which every lover of his faith and of his country should heed, and to which every Christian and every patriot may well consecrate his best endeavors.

Justice and charity, two of the noblest Christian virtues, hold a foremost place in any genuine crusade for social betterment, and make the cause a holy one that appeals even more strongly to the churchman than to the statesman.

The proper consideration of the problem depends much on the way in which we approach it. The initial mistake that is made in trying to find a solution is in viewing the question as a merely economic one. The lives and happiness of millions of human beings are involved in the issue; and this gives it a moral aspect which cannot be ignored. It is much more than an economic problem. From the moment that the well-being of individuals and families is concerned in any question at issue, it is lifted out of the domain of mere economics. Bald political economy with its inflexible law of supply and demand can no longer cope with it. The reciprocal rights and duties inhering in the personality and position of those who are making claims and of those who are resisting them, enter in and create at once a moral issue. In the long run dollars and cents are powerless before a just human right and must give way in every community ruled by principles of justice.

The question of human rights that is involved in the issue between capital and labor goes deeper down than any legal enactment concerning them. In fact, much of the confusion of

thought surrounding the problem springs from a faulty conception of the fundamental sources of human society. There is a tendency to-day to exalt unduly the State, and to regard it as the creator of all the rights and privileges which we enjoy, and to look to it for the solution of all our problems. Such a position is philosophically and historically false. The family is by nature and in fact anterior to the State. There are certain inherent individual and family rights that spring from nature itself and from the fundamental relations established by the Creator in the universe which antedate the constitution of States or the enactments of civil law. The authority of the parent over his child, his right to provide for his family, the choice of the kind of education his children shall receive—all these fundamental rights are rooted in the very nature of family life. So also the rights of conscience are inherent in the individual. They were not created by the State. They are anterior to it by nature and in fact. But if the State is not the creator of them, the State should be the conserver and respecter of them. For it was precisely to safeguard these primary rights of the individual and

of the family that States were formed. To the fact that man is by nature a social being made so by his Creator and to the natural need of individuals and families of protecting their primary and natural rights, which alone and isolated they had not the strength to defend against unjust aggression, States owe their origin and formation. It is the province of the State in consonance with its origin to protect these fundamental, individual and family rights, not to invade them.

Now the right of a man to provide for his family is a natural one. In the exercise of this right he may sell his labor for what he considers just compensation, or may refuse his labor for what he deems an inadequate return. The measure which he must use in determining his decision is that imposed by nature itself. He must support his family; and the living wage which he has a right to demand according to the teaching of Leo XIII, of blessed memory, is the one which will maintain his family in decent and frugal comfort. The man who accepts less through necessity or fear of harder conditions is the victim of force and injustice. This general norm of wage does not exclude the special claims of

labor, skilled and unskilled, which according to the degree of toil or danger incurred, has a right to greater compensation. It simply means that the lowest measure of compensation must be the decent maintenance of a man and his home.

This principle is based on sound political economy and the highest political wisdom. The safety of the State depends upon the integrity of its homes. To build up contented homes should be the aim of enlightened legislation as well as the scope of every movement for social betterment. The source of the nation's strength lies in the stable and well-ordered home, and without it, national greatness swiftly hastens to decay. The homeless man, free from the restraints of domestic life may easily become a menace, and to diminish such a danger becomes the duty of comprehensive patriotic statesmanship.

The maintenance of a home, then, is the standard of the minimum wage dictated by the law of nature, and prompted by the highest public policy. It is the clear right of the wage earner, and to protect this right he may make use of all legitimate means. He may combine with others to enforce it and form a union with

his fellow workers to exert the adequate moral power to maintain it or to better his condition within the limits of justice. To deny him this right is a tyranny and an injustice. He has no other way to safeguard his interests. The rich and the powerful have many ways which they do not hesitate to employ to protect their investments; the workingman has only the support of peaceful combination.

Moreover, workmen's associations may peacefully agitate and seek to mould public opinion in their favor to bring about a redress of real grievances. A campaign of this kind must, however, be legitimately conducted, free from violations of justice and of charity and of the public peace. Finally, the worker in the last resort has the right to refuse to work, that is to strike, and to induce by peaceful and lawful methods others to strike with him when this extreme measure becomes necessary to mitigate unendurable conditions, or to wrest from an unreasonable employer just compensation for his labor, after all other measures have failed.

All this is the teaching of the illustrious Pontiff Leo XIII in his now famous encyclical

"On the Condition of the Workingmen." It has its root in the law of nature, which dictates that a man has a natural right to a wage which will maintain his home in frugal and reasonable comfort. All the other conclusions which we have laid down are but corollaries flowing from this fundamental principle, on the ground that any one who possesses a natural right may make use of all legitimate means to protect it, and to safeguard it from violation.

These are the objective principles which may serve as guiding ones in contests between workers and employers, and if loyally accepted by both sides, would undoubtedly mitigate the bitterness that often arises in labor disputes.

The principles governing the conduct of employers are well known and are generally accepted as the only safe ones which may be followed. They may be summed up as follows: Capital has a right to a just share of the profits, but only to a just share: Employers should treat those who work under them with humanity and justice; they should be solicitous for the healthful conditions of the places where workmen daily toil: they should use all reasonable means to

promote the material and moral well-being of their employees. They should be kindly humane and just in all their relations with them.

We are well aware that some of these principles find no place in a political and commercial economy which has become wholly pagan. We are convinced, however, that the social problem of the relations between employers and workers can never be settled on any other than a Christian basis. The attitude of each towards the other must radically change round to a Christian one, else we shall have the spectacle of two opposing forces facing each other in a hostile spirit, each stubbornly insisting on its pound of flesh, with no thought of the Christian brotherhood which ought to bind them together.

The present deplorable situation in the world of labor has been brought about by a neglect of Christian principles, and by the attempt to put this question on a material basis only. On the other hand, riches and power bring danger in their train unless moral rectitude and moral standards are accepted as guiding sign posts along the way of life. Money gives power, and it may be sought after too anxiously without due regard to the principles of justice.

Saint Paul has declared in the sixth chapter of his first epistle to Timothy that "the desire of money is the root of all evil," meaning, of course, its inordinate and greedy desire. Men are forgetting these principles. They are making too much of money for money's sake. They have forgotten the injunction of the Saviour given in the twelfth chapter of Saint Luke: "take heed and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life doth not consist in the abundance of things which he possesseth." There is need of this solemn warning.

Men with money should be careful to regard it as a means to do good rather than an end. They should beware lest its possession make them arrogant, tyrannical and despisers of their less fortunate brethren. The great restraining force against these natural tendencies is the spirit of religion, which subdues while it strengthens and sanctifies while it chastens. Whether as individuals or as members of corporate bodies, men of wealth must remember that the Christian law obliges them in one capacity as in the other. There is no double moral standard, no loop-hole of escape from the sanctions which the moral

law of Christ imposes. Men of wealth should not buy that which is not sellable according to Christian ethics. It is an abuse of their wealth and an infraction of the moral code, and a crime against society.

The merely natural outlook has produced another idea of wealth which is a source of danger. Men regard themselves as absolute owners of what they possess, and claim the right to do with it what they please. In one sense this is true. They are owners, and exclusive owners. But there is a law higher than themselves, and there is a God above them. To stand stubbornly upon individual ground and because they are owners to absolve themselves from all obligations to society and their weaker brethren is paganism, pure and simple. In reality they are according to the Divine Word stewards of God. The greater their wealth, the greater their responsibilities.

Before the so-called Reformation, this was the Christian conception of wealth as any one who will read the records of history will readily see. There was poverty, but not pauperism. The rich man saw in the poor his brethren in Jesus Christ, and was well content to share his

treasures on earth that he might lay up for himself treasures in heaven.

The individualistic principle of life was introduced by the revolt against the authority of the Church. The unity of faith was broken and Christendom ceased to be one great organic social body, one brotherhood in Christ. Once granted, the principle that man can choose, as he would a garment, his own religion, the most supreme issue of life, the way is open for him to have his own way in things of all moral import. The direct tendency of the spirit of individualism is to breed self-sufficiency and selfishness. That it does not always do so is owing solely to the fact that it is not always carried out to its logical outcome.

There is need of a return to old Catholic ideals. Men must learn to give to every cause of religion and charity and mutual help, in proportion to their means. Rich men should bear in mind that they shall one day hear the voice of the Master of all saying, "render an account of thy stewardship." There must be a generous recognition, on the part of those whom God has blessed with abundance, of their obligations to

society and the poorer members of the human family. The Christian spirit must be enkindled in the soul and this will of itself arouse the noble and generous disposition to approach conflicts with a calm and balanced mind, and with a readiness to listen to higher impulses than the mere desire for victory over helpless and oftentimes maddened men, who alas too often have good reason to believe that the rich have lost all sense of kindly feeling and think only of themselves.

On the other hand, workers are just as much bound by the Christian law as their employers. This fact seems to be lost sight of at times, and men give way to their baser impulses. The spirit of envy generates discontent, and the attitude of the laborer towards his employer becomes un-Christian and pagan. There is a disposition, too, to regard work as an intolerable burden to be gotten rid of as soon as possible, and with as little effort as possible. This is contrary to Christian teaching. The Wise Man in Ecclesiastes who had tasted all the pleasures of life was forced to confess: "for I have found that there is nothing better for a man than to rejoice in his work." This natural discontent is

fomented and intensified by the noisy agitators of Socialism, the enemies of God and man, who would overturn the foundations upon which human society is built, and exile God from His universe.

This singular set of men who seek to conceal the malice of their real principles, but who cannot, are a brood of disturbers. Their doctrines are an abomination striking at the foundations of family life and religion. Their spirit is not new. A similar class of men were graphically described by Saint Paul in his second epistle to the Thesalonians; "for also when we were with you, this we declared unto you: that if any man shall not work, neither let him eat. For we have heard that they are some among you who walk disorderly, working not at all, but curiously meddling. Now we charge them that are such, and beseech them by the Lord Jesus Christ, that working with silence, they would eat their own bread."

There is not, and cannot be a Catholic Socialist. Leo XIII has rejected such a fellowship in his immortal encyclical. The principles of Socialism are utterly opposed to the principles of Christianity. They are mutually destructive

of each other. Certain misguided Christians may call themselves Socialists, but objectively, a Catholic Socialist is an utter impossibility.

Another source of unrest among working people, and one against which they must be warned, is the desire to give themselves over too much to the pleasures of life. It is directly contrary to the Christian, Catholic spirit. It leads people to live beyond their incomes, and is the fruitful source of family troubles and discontent with one's station in life. A Christian people should ever remember that the Christian life is one of restraint. Legitimate recreations are good, but not the surrender of the heart to the pleasures of this life. They should bear in mind the warning of Saint Paul, that among those who make dangerous times in the history of the world are "lovers more of pleasures than of God." More economy at home and less perpetual seeking of empty pleasure would remove much of the unnecessary discontent and murmuring which, even without real cause, we hear on many sides.

The social problem of the relations between employers and workers must be solved on a Christian basis, or not at all. They must face

and that not dollars, but peace and contentment, are the richest and most precious possessions in life, then will the clamor of these noisy hawkers of poisonous social panaceas appear what it is in very truth, the vicious propaganda of enemies of the Christian faith, and deceitful disturbers of the peace of States.

During the Holy Season of Advent, we charge those having care of souls to instruct their people in the true doctrine of the Church concerning their duties in the realm of labor; to proclaim again to the workman that the consolations which religion holds out to him are the only real and lasting foundations of true happiness here below; and that the envy, the jealousy and hatred of class, only render more and more bitter the contest which, even were it victorious, would end only in the ashes of disillusionment.

Let them announce fearlessly to the rich the duties of their station, and the responsibility of their stewardship. Let them courageously stand, as the Church has ever stood, as the defender of the weak, the poor and the oppressed, warning them, however, of their solemn duty and just obligations.

So may these days be sacredly employed to bring about that peace to men of good will which the Christ Child came to establish on earth when the first Christmas dawned over Bethlehem.

May the Blessed Saviour and Redeemer of men send among us, during these days of preparation, the fire of his holy love, that its glow and warmth may cast out the darkness of false doctrines and the chill of unchristian distrust and unfriendliness, so that we may all, rich and poor, employer and employed, gather around the crib of the Divine Child with Mary and Joseph to adore our God, whose first law is that of light and love. And may the blessing of God be with you always.

Given at Boston, on the Feast of St. Clement,
November 23d, 1912.