# THE CATHOLIC ATTITUDE TO MACHINERY

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# MACHINERY

THE BASIS OF THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL ORDER IS THE FAMILY. AND CORRELATIVE TO THE INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY IS THE INSTITUTION OF PROPERTY, WHICH MAY BE TERMED THE KEYSTONE OF THE SOCIAL ORDER. Property is natural to man. From Man's free will it follows that he can possess private property in order to be independent as far as possible from the domination of other wills. From man's rational nature it follows that he must establish a lien over goods for future use, and not live from day to day on chance findings, like beasts. The family requires the institution of property for its existence. Moreover, the most convenient method of production is that method by which every man looks after those goods which he is to use for his own maintenance. Such is the Catholic scheme in brief.

Now we come up against what may be called the Marxian dilemma. How can private property be reconciled with modern methods of production. Marx said no reconciliation was possible; that large-scale production was incompatible with private property; and that the only just way of dealing with it was ownership in common. Now on the surface this argument seems to have much to be said for it. For there are four ways of dealing with the problem of large-scale factory production and ownership:

1. First, one man can own the factory, while the workers in it are propertyless. Such was the method of early capitalism.
2. Secondly, there may be many owners in common, but they are distinct from the actual workers in the factory. That is the modern method of the limited company, in which ownership is divorced from both responsibility and control; and from one aspect it may be defined as a perverted form of Communism, for the shareholders all own the means of production in common.
3. Thirdly, we may have State Socialism, in which the means of production are owned by the State, as in theory representing the community.
4. Fourthly, we may have various forms of Syndicalism, in which the actual workers in the factory own it collectively. Co-partnership is a compromise between this form and the second form, of modern Capitalism.

But it will be noticed that none of these forms fulfils the Thomistic criterion: that a man looks after his own better than that which is common to all or many, for in all these forms the actual workers either have no part at all in the ownership of the means of production, or else own it in common. Neither do the personality arguments apply, for the individual worker cannot dispose of the property of another, or that which he owns in common with others, by the exercise of his individual reason; and also his will is correspondingly hampered. Whence we

judge that large-scale machine-production is incompatible with private property, in the sense that the worker can possess no individual ownership of the instrument he uses. It is too big. If he has any property in the thing at all, it must be in common with others. He can never own the thing itself. He can only share in it. Whence the instrument is "common to many".

To take the problem of machinery from another angle. Man is made up of both body and soul. The chief power of man's soul is his intellect. Large-scale machine production means the separation of the intelligence used in the productive process from the actual manual work. The actual worker has no responsibility for the machine he tends, or for the stuff he turns out. He does not make the stuff. The machine makes it. He has not designed the machine. Somebody else has done that. He has only the minimum opportunity of putting any intelligence into his work. While he is working he is subhuman. For him the art of making things is no longer the "recta ratio factibilium," the right application of reason to the things to be made, of St. Thomas (Summa, I. 2. q. 57. art. 4). The right of using his reason has been taken away from him during the most important part of his life – his working hours. He who was once a craftsman is reduced to the state in which he performs only a series of repetitive acts. Whence we deduce that large-scale machine production is derogatory to human dignity.

Moreover, this deprivation of the workman's intelligence from his work destroys all pleasure in work. "And I have found that nothing is better for a man to rejoice in his work, and that is his portion."- (Eccles.3.22.) If happiness consists in life according to reason, this method of production has destroyed happiness for the normal man during his working hours, which are, after all, the main portion of his lifetime.

So the primary objection to machinery is that it deprives man of his creative power. Industrialism has cut off the connection between a working man's intellect and the labour.

Formerly, it was the craftsman who handed down the essential knowledge that forms the basis of civilization. Now the whole basis of culture rests in the hands of two small classes – technicians and artists —the elite of the industrial world. They are the engineers who design the machines, and those who design the products of the machines. Work has changed, for it is no longer human. Man no longer puts his whole self into work, his mind & body, so work is no longer a reflection of the creative power of God – who according to St. Thomas is the great "Artifex", the craftsman who fashioned all things according to right reason.

The second great objection against machinery is that machines create unemployment. It is the problem of the breakdown of distribution. The introduction of machines

was meant to bring in more profit, less wages, & speedier production. But here is the problem -- machines create unemployment and diminish the demand for goods. You cannot throw the producer into the street & then expect him to pay for the goods made by the machine which has displaced him. Production is increased – buying power is decreased.

This is the bare problem. There are in practice other elements which enter in and obscure this basic contradiction. The logical working-out of the principle that machinery displaces men has to a greater or less extent been hidden by two things.

First, the starting of new industries; such as mechanical transport, electrical industries, etc. However, even in these, more intense mechanization comes into play, and men are once again replaced by the machines, to be absorbed into other and newer industries. Obviously this cannot go on ad *infinitum.* There must be a limit somewhere, and there are signs that it is being reached. From this aspect the problem of machinery is prevented from working itself out to its logical conclusion by a constant stimulation of new wants. A fresh issue rises here – the fundamental contradiction between industrial and Christian Ethics. Maximum production and maximum satisfaction are phrases which denote the essence of industrialism. Asceticm is poison to the industrial system. It would be almost true to say that every act of mortification causes

a machine to stop somewhere. So J. H. Randall, in "Religion and the Modern World," writes:

> "The long centuries that preached renunciation and spirituality have been forgotten. With a golden flood pouring from the machine & trickling down to all who traffic with it, asceticism in any form, either medieval other-worldliness or this-worldly abstinence from pleasure and far-seeing thrift of the puritan, seems both futile and wrong."

The second cause making for the contradiction inherent in the uncontrolled use of machinery is the constant opening up of new markets. It becomes a matter of life and death for the Industrial State to increase production in order to reabsorb the unemployed created by previous mechanization. To consume this increased production new markets must be constantly opened up. But soon after they are opened up they are closed again; for the still unindustrialised countries are not content to remain in the position of suppliers of food & raw materials. They join in the race themselves after obtaining their own machine industries.

In order to solve the problem it is proposed to establish the "Leisure State," in which, relieved from the necessity of work by the labour of machines, men may enjoy lives of almost uninterrupted leisure. The essential goodness of human nature is the fundamental basis of this theory. So we are taken into the realms of theology. It was the

Calvinist and Jansenist heresy which maintained that human nature was essentially corrupt. This was condemned by the Council of Trent. To hold, on the contrary, that human nature is perfectly and gloriously good is (besides being contrary to common sense) the Pelagian heresy. Orthodoxy, as usual, steers a middle course, and teaches that human nature remains essentially good, but grievously weak, and liable to fall oft and suddenly. The point is that all men are not capable of using leisure, and yet live moral lives. To do this demands a devoting of oneself to the contemplation of truth. All are not capable of the contemplative life. "Those who on accountof their passions are driven to action are naturally more apt to the active life because of their inquietude of spirit." (St. Thomas, "Summa" II. II, Q. 182. art. 4, ad 3). Here Christian economics is in touch with the world as it is, knowing the fact of original sin, and its results. Besides, it would probably be a deadly bore, and further, according to Stuart Chase, could only work under the autocratic government of a co-opted oligarchy of technicians. Eric Gill has the situation in a nutshell, "we aim at arranging things so that we shall do all necessary bodily labour by mechanical, that is to say *non-spiritual* means, and having reduced that labour to the smallest possible amount, we then hope to enjoy spiritual things in our leisure hours . . . the separation of matter & mind is man's death, & industrialism leads so clearly towards that separation that we may

say: death is the actual aim of industrialism -- its diabolical direction."

The solution of the Leisure State is opposed to Christianity. How would men occupy their leisure? In intellectual work? St. Thomas gives us the arguments against this. Nor is it any better to say men would occupy their leisure in pursuit of craftsmanship as a hobby. One of the main elements of pleasure in work – that one is doing something useful —would be absent. To quote an 'orthodox' English economist, "the truth seems to be that as human nature is constituted, man rapidly degenerates unless he has some hard work to do, some difficulties to overcome; and that some strenuous exertion is necessary for physical & moral health." (Marshall, "Principles of Economics", 3.6.) In other words, the devil finds work for idle hands to do, or "man is born to labour as the bird to fly-" (Pope Pius XI in Quadragesimo Anno.)

To look at the other side of the question. Before the advent of the machines not all labour was human labour; there existed a vast amount of monotonous toil. The toil of the miner would be a case in point. Nevertheless, although the introducers of machinery had not thought of lightening man's labour, we can if we wish yet bring good out of evil, and, by using machines to do the necessarily monotonous work more quickly, have men to spend more time on labour most fitted to their nature-that of the hand directed by the brain.

It seems, therefore, that in the society where means were most perfectly adapted to the proper end, small scale methods of production would predominate. That is to say, workmen in general would use tools and small machines over which they had personal control. Machinery should not be allowed to compete with the work of the craftsman, but should be restricted to its proper sphere, the performance of monotonous and non-human work.

The second & complementary rule is that the machine should be subordinated to the artisan; that the large-scale organization of modern industry should give way to the vastly more important principle of the just distribution of property.

Machinery must not be allowed to rule man, but must be subject to man & controlled by him. To use the machine or not must be a choice to be made by man. His will must be asserted against all non-human forces. In such circumstances there will be no over-production or underconsumption, no breakdown of distribution.

In coming to this conclusion are we within the main stream of Catholic social tradition? Has the common tradition of Catholic Social Philosophers been that large-scale machine industry is the best possible and must be retained at all costs? It must be admitted that some have appeared to hold this position. That others decidedly have not is evident from the following quotations:

"Bodily labor, which was decreed by Providence for the

good of man's body and soul, even after original sin, has everywhere been changed into an instrument of strange perversion: for dead matter leaves the factory ennobled and transformed; where men are corrupted & degraded". (Pope Pius XI in "Quadragesimo Anno".)

Adam Muller: "The spirit reacts unceasingly against the division and mechanization of labor which Adam Smith prized so highly; the spirit desires to preserve man's personality". (Elements der Staatskunst, 1.57.)

The Franciscan, Belliot, in his "Manuel de Sociologie Catholique" (p.225.) writes: "From the point of view of social life, mechanization seems to lead to great inconveniences: "Relatively to society in general, by the excessive vulgarization of the luxurious, the comfortable, the superfluous. Above all for the working class, for whom the machines have the following great inconveniences:

(1) They lower the intellectual standards of the workmen. In effect, work being accomplished automatically by the machine, the workman ordinarily finds himself reduced to a secondary role — monotonous, routine-like, unintelligent. He is the servant of the machine: he is its accessory. It follows that he becomes himself a mere cog, an impersonal and relatively insignificant "hand", who can nearly always be replaced. The preponderance of the machine causes, for the workman, a certain loss of professional status. He is relegated to the second place. He loses his individuality and becomes a mere machine tender . . .

(2) The machines over fatigue the workman by the excessive attention which they exact from him.
(3) They render it impossible for the workman to become his own master.
(4) Mechanization imposes unemployment on a great number of workmen ... That is why the question of machinery constitutes at present one of the gravest and most disquieting elements in the social problem."

Devas in his "Groundwork of Economics," groups the disadvantages of this form of production under three headings – aesthetic, psychical, and physical. Under the first heading he places that deprivation of production of its intellectual character which causes beauty. Under the second the injury to the mental state of the workman. "I doubt", he says, "whether any efforts in the hours of leisure can make up for the loss of a man's trade as a means of mental cultivation." Under the third heading he places the injurious effects on the body. "What is wearisome is not so much great muscular effort, which machinery has in fact rendered less needful, but rather the ceaseless strain, the uninterrupted continuance of effort."

Amintore Fanfani in "Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism ', p. 159, has: "Both during the predominance of the medieval guild system & during that of capitalism, the Church, and those Catholics who listened to her voice, set or sought to set bounds not lawfully to be overstept, to the course of economic life--even at the cost of a sac-

rifice of mechanical and technical progress, which in the Catholic conception of society, has never been identical with civilization."

There remains one other great name- Eric Gill, who is described as "one of the best commentators on the social elements in the Summa". Speaking of the Industrial System in "Work and Property" he says: "the workman is becoming simply a minder or tender of machinery, & less & less is he responsible for the form & quality of what the machine turns out . . . For the majority of workers today it is as near as possible true to say that the work they do has no spiritual quality whatever. Under industrialism a system has been evolved in which man, the workman, is purely material (that is to say, as nearly as possible, for we cannot completely eradicate his nature), & his spiritual nature must find occupation and assuagement when he is not working." We cannot do better than conclude in Mr. Gill's words: "Either private ownership, for the sake of the work to be done, must be re-established, or, deliberately surrendering men's immanent & proprietary right to imprint on matter the mark of rational being (turning away, in consequence, from the Christian society in which there shall be private ownership for the sake of public use), we must accept communistic industrialism and look forward to the Leisure State."

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