

Theology of Rural Life: A Catholic Perspective

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THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT which I shall present draws its principles from theology and philosophy. However, it recognizes that these must be tested and refined in the reality of the concrete, existing social order. For this reason the theological approach should be integrated with the social sciences, as the popes have tried to do. The Catholic perspective, as I shall outline it, will be based almost entirely on papal social encyclicals and addresses. Here we find a consistent tradition of social thought, but one which at the same time clearly indicates development. I shall begin with Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*² of 1891, followed by Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*³ of 1931, by Pius XII's social addresses including the address, *La Solemnita della Pentecoste* of 1941,⁴ commemorative of *Rerum Novarum*, and most recently, by John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra*⁵ of 1961, the 70th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. Many sections and passages can be found in these documents and in many other papal addresses making explicit reference to agriculture. The popes draw principally from two sources: the natural moral law and the social teaching of the Gospel. This, then,

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²Leo XIII, Pope, encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum: On the Condition of the Working Man*, May 15, 1891, trans. in "Principles for Peace," ed. H. C. Koenig, National Catholic Welfare Conference, Wash., D. C., 1943, pp. 52-81.

³Pius XI, Pope, encyclical letter, *Quadragesimo Anno: On Reconstructing the Social Order*, May 15, 1931, trans. in "Principles for Peace," ed. H. C. Koenig, National Catholic Welfare Conference, Wash., D. C., 1943, pp. 397-446.

⁴Pius XII, Pope, address, *La Solemnita della Pentecoste*, June 1, 1941, trans. in "Principles for Peace," ed. H. C. Koenig, National Catholic Welfare Conference, Wash., D. C., 1943, pp. 719-29.

⁵John XXIII, Pope, encyclical letter, *Mater et Magistra: Christianity and Social Progress*, May 15, 1961. National Catholic Welfare Conference, Wash., D. C., 1961.

will be the Catholic perspective on goals and values in agriculture. Because of the importance of the natural law approach in the Catholic perspective, I wish at the outset to clarify this much misunderstood concept.

NOTES ON THE NATURAL MORAL LAW

The natural law rests on the assumption of purposefulness in creation. All things are directed to their goal by Divine Reason; creatures below man, through the implanted tendencies and instincts of their nature; man through the light of reason through which the Divine plan becomes intelligible to him. The natural law is, therefore, nothing more than man's reason acting as interpreter of the Divine Reason. Belief in the natural law is belief in the power of natural reason to arrive at moral truth for the individual and for society. St. Paul testified to its existence when he spoke of the law written in the hearts of the gentiles for their guidance.⁶ In this age of diverse religious, intellectual and cultural ideas, the natural moral law—human reason—provides the one possible basis for agreement in social thought and in agricultural policy. Pius XII traced the social and political evils of the day to the rejection of the natural law. This is a judgment which underscores its importance in Catholic social thought.

Scholars have criticized the natural law as being too inflexible. This objection rests on a misunderstanding. The natural law is not a series of propositions rationally and rigidly deduced from some first principle and rigidly applied to every person and age without distinction. Rather the natural law doctrine affirms that there is a certain basic pattern of order and value in human affairs, a reflection of human nature. It provides certain guide lines within which change must be confined if it is to benefit man. At the same time it recognizes that social principles must be tested in the real world and must always reflect the social, political and technological characteristics of the day, otherwise they are without truth or relevancy.

As guides to action these social principles must be workable. This is not to suggest, however, that social practice takes precedence over the principles, as if changing conditions could invalidate them and give rise to new ones. For example, the natural law outlook would not admit the possibility that man may evolve to a point where political society becomes unnecessary, or that in the complex society of the future the individual person

⁶Saint Paul, Epistle to the Romans, Chap. 2.

may become totally subordinate to the state, as a totalitarian philosophy implies. Human nature sets certain limits upon social change. It is the burden of social principles to define these limits and to guide social change within them.

You will note that this is precisely the approach to the social question used by John XXIII in his encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*,⁷ which is a very important document for Catholic social thought. In the introductory portion of this work he observes that a principal characteristic of our day is the multiplication of social relationships. He notes that these developments are at once both a symptom and a cause of the growing intervention of public authorities in matters pertaining to the more intimate aspects of personal life. He puts this situation to the test of the natural law principle affirming the primacy of the person over the system and asks: "Will men perhaps, then become automatons, and cease to be personally responsible, as these social relationships multiply more and more?"⁸

His answer is that this need not occur if public authorities act according to a correct understanding of the common good. They must, for example, allow intermediary bodies within the expanded social structure to be ruled by their own laws. These intermediary bodies, such as a labor union, must, in turn, be true communities in which the individual members are treated as persons and are encouraged to participate in the affairs of the group.⁹ Thus we see that social organization is morally neutral. It furthers the true common good when it respects the dignity and individuality of the person; it becomes a social evil when it organizes persons in such a manner that they are merely objects rather than responsible subjects. Persons organized without regard to their individual differences and personal prerogatives (i.e., as objects merely) do not form a true, organic, moral unity. They do not form true communities within the social body.

The natural law approach avoids the error of those who, like the Marxists, regard social changes as the result of "a blind drive of natural forces."¹⁰ It believes that principles of justice, particularly of social justice, can be interjected into social change to guide it constructively. At the same time it avoids the error of those who decry social organization, as such, as an infringement of individual freedom. The natural law principle of the primacy of the person is a surer guide for social policy than the nebulous value of individual freedom. The good of the person is

⁷John XXIII, Pope, *op. cit.*

⁸John XXIII, *op. cit.*, n. 62.

⁹John XXIII, *op. cit.*, n. 65.

¹⁰John XXIII, *op. cit.*, n. 63.

a true end, a goal, whereas freedom is but a means. Freedom requires further specification before it can qualify as a value.

Firstly, this chapter gives a philosophical and theological analysis of certain selected goals and values inherent in the occupation of agriculture.

Secondly, it deals with the structure of rural life. Under this heading it shows the decisive role two institutions have always played in forming the person: the rural family and private property in land. Also it shows the need for achieving an organic structure in society, and in agriculture as an integral part of society, through the rural family, through professional associations and mutual-aid societies among farmers and through the rural community.

Thirdly, it indicates the critical need for a strong social consciousness and religious outlook among farmers.

RURAL LIFE: A SPECIAL WAY OF LIFE

In presenting the Catholic evaluation of the occupation of agriculture I shall avoid, if possible, any romanticism. I shall refrain, for example, from quoting the classic texts of Virgil's *Georgics*. Moreover, after reading Professor Jaffa's chapter, *Agrarian Virtue and Republican Freedom*,¹¹ I shall be hesitant to quote Thomas Jefferson or defend his unrealistic dream of a pure rural economy. I am intrigued by the statement attributed to Paul A. Miller that "The modern value orientation of rural people in the United States is a condition of ambiguity."¹² And, finally, I note with some reservations the opinion expressed at the 1960 conference on goals and values that "too many people are working at producing food and fibre."¹³

These considerations make one pause and ask whether we should continue to regard agriculture as a special way of life, and, accordingly, whether the preservation of this way of life should be made a goal in our American society. Wisdom is needed to answer such a question; and I feel that the words of the popes on this subject, particularly of Pius XII, are worthy of careful pondering. Pius XII was strongly convinced that the inherent moral qualities and values of rural life are such as to

¹¹ Jaffa, Harry V., *Agrarian Virtue and Republican Freedom*, in "Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy." Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1961, p. 143.

¹² Miller, Paul A., *Social, Economic, and Political Values of Farm People*. Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1960, pp. 80-96. Quoted by Olaf F. Larson.

¹³ Larson, Olaf F., *Goals and Values of Farm People*, in "Goals and Values in Agricultural Policy." Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1961, p. 143.

give it a specific character. He recognized that rural life is under influences that conspire to divest it of this character, assimilating it to the life of urban and industrial centers, "making the country a simple extension of the city."¹⁴ He regards this as a problem of great moment:

Today it can be said that the destiny of all mankind is at stake. Will men be successful or not in balancing this influence (of industrial capitalism) in such a way as to preserve for the spiritual, social and economic life of the rural world its specific character? Will they succeed in assuring it, if not a preponderant, at least an equal impact on the life of the human family as a whole?¹⁵

REVERENCE FOR THE SOIL A FOUNDATION FOR PIETY

The farmer's love of his land has been pointed out on many occasions. He cannot be unconscious of its inexhaustible fecundity and productivity; and, if he is a just man, he deeply reveres the soil as the source of life and sustenance afforded him by the good God. This trait is an expression of the virtue of piety. Piety moves us to recognize our debt to those who are the source of what we are: to God who is our first principle, to our parents and our country that have given us birth and nourishment. In the mind of the good farmer these things are closely related; his reverence for mother earth is one with his reverence for God and his parents. Moreover, this feeling quite naturally embraces a reverence for his native country — the fatherland. Love of land, love of God and love of country spring from a common inspiration, namely, reverence for a father or nourishing mother. Emerson confirms this in his observation that any relation to the land generates patriotism.¹⁶ We notice, too, how one of our patriotic songs, "America the Beautiful," associates love of country with love of the land. For such reasons as this it has always been felt that the farmer's deep attachment to the soil is a source of stability and strength in nations. I think it doubtful whether any other agency can be substituted for agriculture in laying this natural foundation for true piety.

The farmer's relation to the soil, and likewise his relation to the elements, plants and animals, take a deeper significance

¹⁴ Pius XII, Pope, address, *Problems of Rural Life*, Rome, July 2, 1951, in "Christianity and the Land," National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Des Moines, Ia.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Emerson, Ralph Waldo, address, *The Young American*, Feb. 7, 1844, in "Nature, Addresses and Lectures," Brainard Publ. Co., Boston, p. 342.

when seen in the light of Christ's redemption. St. Paul tells us that Christ has delivered all creatures "from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."¹⁷ Therefore, it becomes the Christian's duty and privilege to bring all creation to the praise and service of God. Even as the Christian farmer himself, so also his fields, flocks and crops are now susceptible of being offered to God. It is with this in mind that the Catholic Church, through its many sacramental blessings, extends to natural things the cleansing, uplifting power of the redemption. Through the Christian farmer she brings all these things to the service of God. She invites him to bring these, at least in spirit, to the sacrifice of the altar.

LABOR THAT FORMS THE MAN

In speaking of the work of the farmer I wish to emphasize its therapeutic value. Much of the work of contemporary man, such as repetitious factory or clerical work, lacks this value. Though we must accept this condition of things, we should not organize agriculture without giving thought to this social problem. Classical Socialism solves it by saying that when everything has been organized for production, then the worker will be able to find the good life in a utopia of material plenty which he will have the leisure to enjoy. In this view, work is to be endured; a man enjoys life and perfects himself in his leisure hours, principally, and not through his work. Work is not regarded as having any significant cultural value.

The Catholic perspective, for theological as well as philosophical reasons, is quite different. Man has need to work not only for the acquisition of the necessities of life, the primary end of manual labor, but also because it is necessary for his spiritual and physical development. It is a matter of common experience that the harmony and balance between man's reason and bodily appetites is defective. Catholic faith finds the explanation for this in Original Sin. Arduous labor that fully engages a man helps him to overcome this condition. It helps him to control himself and to maintain a sense of his own worth and a balanced outlook upon life; but in order to achieve this wholesome effect work must be carried out on a level of rationality and creativeness calling for judgment and decision.

The popes have felt that agricultural labor qualifies in these respects. With this in mind, they have expressed concern that an

¹⁷ Saint Paul, Epistle to the Romans, Chap. 8.

impersonal economic organization of society based predominantly upon mathematical calculations tends to reduce the laborers to mere objects without any significant identity.¹⁸ Professional work "becomes so dependent on and subordinate to the 'efficiency' of the machine and of the tools of labor that the worker is rapidly exhausted."¹⁹ Because the living things with which the farmer works do not lend themselves readily to merely quantitative determinations but must be handled according to the far more complex laws of the organic realm, it is reasonable to hope that the agricultural worker can be spared the de-personalizing influences of modern technology and economic organization. This would seem to be the import of Pius XII's words that labor on farms "still reflects the natural order willed by God, namely, that man, with his own labor, ought to rule material things, not material things rule man."²⁰ No more profound reason could be given for the inherent dignity of agriculture.

In concluding this evaluation of agricultural labor, I want to make it clear that Catholic thought does not reject technology whose benefits are obvious. It heartily endorses whatever will eliminate drudgery and develop resources; but in doing so it cautions against the outlook that regards work as something to be avoided, lest men, seeking inordinately to escape the condition of work, fall into the evils that attend idleness and the excessive mechanization of life.

For these reasons, as well as for others generally recognized by the friends of rural life, papal thought places a high value on agriculture. The popes believe that a rural people in virtue of their distinct character exercise a profound influence on the biological and intellectual, spiritual and religious development of humanity. They believe that this influence is of paramount importance in keeping society in right balance. They regard agriculture as a special way of life and would urge the preservation of this way of life as a goal of high priority for our American society.

STRUCTURE IN RURAL SOCIETY

I turn now to the structure of rural society, two important elements of which are the rural family and the institution of

¹⁸ Pius XII, Pope, Christmas Eve Address, 1952, in "The Catholic Mind," America Press, New York. Vol. 51, No. 1082, Feb., 1953, pp. 111-22.

¹⁹ Pius XII, Pope, Christmas Eve Address, 1953, in "The Catholic Mind," America Press, New York. Vol. 52, No. 1095, Mar., 1954, p. 179.

²⁰ Pius XII, Pope, address, Life of the Farmer, Nov. 15, 1946. National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Des Moines, Ia., p. 9.

private property. Of the family I need speak only briefly. The practical aspects of the question are treated later by the Reverend Father Edward O'Rourke, Executive Director of the National Catholic Life Conference.

The Family on the Land

The popes urge us to provide a social and economical environment where the rural family can flourish. They point out the decisive influence it exerts upon the person and its proven worth in the formation of good citizens. According to Pope XII the family reaches its full stature as a cell of society when it is on the land: "Only that stability which is rooted in one's holding makes of the family the vital and most perfect and fecund cell of society, joining up in a brilliant manner in progressive cohesion the present and future generations."²¹ The National Catholic Rural Life Conference has as a principal objective the preservation of the family farm.

Property in Land

The Catholic Church has long been advocating a widespread distribution of property, particularly land, because of its primary importance for sound social structure. Private ownership of productive property fixes responsibility, gives security to the family and gives stability to communities. During these last few decades, when human dignity has suffered much, private property has taken on a new importance as a bulwark of human freedom. For these reasons the popes have urged that the benefits of ownership should be made available to the many.

Filled with anguish over the violation of human dignity during and after World War II, Pius XII bases his appeal for ownership on the dignity of man. Property aids not only economic freedom, but political, cultural and religious freedom as well. It "provides man with a secure material basis of the highest import, on which to rise to the fulfillment, with reasonable liberty, of his moral duties. . . ."²² Man might achieve security under Socialism or some other form of statism, but he would have no protec-

²¹ Pius XII, Pope, address, *La Solennita della Pentecoste*, June 1, 1941, trans. in "Principles for Peace," ed. H. C. Koenig, National Catholic Welfare Conference, Wash., D. C., 1943, n. 1692.

²² Pius XII, Pope, *op. cit.*, n. 1684.

tion for his personal freedom, no economic basis for his human dignity. Systems of social insurance or protection by public law are inadequate substitutes. Ownership should be widespread: "Small and medium holdings in agriculture, in the arts and trades . . . should be guaranteed and promoted; cooperative unions should insure for them the advantages of big business."²³ As a noted authority on Catholic social thought observed, "Pius XII wants the structure of economic society to be an inherent bulwark of freedom. This means diffusion of power through diffusion of ownership."²⁴

John XXIII makes explicit the recommendations of his predecessor. He wants the body politic "to modify economic and social life so that the way is made easier for widespread private possession of such things as durable goods, homes, gardens, tools requisite for artisan enterprises and family-type farms, investments in enterprises of medium and large size."²⁵ Man needs a piece of land, or a set of tools, or stocks as the external expression of his interior freedom.

The need for land is seen also in the consequences of its denial. When land ownership becomes the privilege of the few and is used in a socially irresponsible way, then we see a decay of the social order, as in areas of South America. And when land is held by the state, then we see a de-personalization of the masses.

I have spoken of the rural family and land ownership as the two pillars of a sound social structure. It is generally recognized that these institutions have been very successful in forming man as a person. In societies less advanced than our own, their existence was not seriously threatened. But this is no longer true. Technological and economic developments have created a new world — that of the gigantic enterprises of modern industry, a marvelous manifestation of the inventive and constructive genius of the human spirit. These enterprises carry with them a characteristic spirit that pervades our entire culture as well as a technique that modifies our entire economy. (A more complete analysis of this spirit and its effects is given at the conclusion of this chapter.) Already this has affected farming techniques and the system of land ownership. The enlarging of farms and concentration of ownership that have already begun will likely continue. This trend represents a danger to a system of distributed land ownership, and, consequently, to the rural family rooted in

²³ Pius XII, Pope, address, Sept. 1, 1944.

²⁴ Cronin, John F., S.S., *Social Economics of Pope Pius XII*, in "The Catholic Mind," America Press, New York. Vol. 49, No. 1066, Oct., 1951, p. 686.

²⁵ John XXIII, Pope, encyclical letter, *Mater et Magistra*, n. 115.

such ownership. Pius XII was deeply aware of this trend. His proposals in regard to it are at the same time conservative and progressive. Technology is a blessing, at least potentially. However, its development must be under moral control. An earnest and persevering effort must be made to assimilate it in such manner as not to destroy the rural family and distributed land ownership. True progress must conserve proven benefits of the past. His judgment of the situation is expressed in measured words as follows:

History teaches that other forms of economic organization (other than the gigantic forms) have always had a constructive influence upon all society, an influence which benefited both the basic institutions of family, state and private property and those freely formed by men. We may point out by way of example the undeniable advantages which have followed where an economy based chiefly on agriculture or the crafts has predominated.

Modern industry has unquestionably had beneficial results but the problem which arises today is this: will a world in which the only economic form to find acceptance is a vast productive system be equally fitted to exert a happy influence upon society in general and upon the three fundamental institutions of society in particular?

We must answer that the impersonal character of such a world is contrary to the fundamentally personal nature of those institutions which the Creator has given to human society.²⁶

It is in terms of this problem that we must understand the papal plan for an organically structured society which is to be the means of bringing technology and the gigantic enterprises of industry to the service of the family and the person. This plan has come to be known as the vocational organization of society, sometimes called the industry-council plan. It was first proposed by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno*.²⁷ One purpose was to lessen the tension between labor and capital. Another was to provide the large modern state with agencies that could speak and act authoritatively within the various sectors of the economy and also serve as mediators between the state and the individual. Its third purpose was to enable the individual to assume a responsible role in the segment of the economy where he works. The individual farmer, for example, can do little by himself to establish a just price for his products, but in cooperation with farmers of the region this is possible. Alone he faces a similar difficulty in paying a just wage to his employees. This wage is subject to factors which are beyond his power as an individual to

²⁶ Pius XII, Pope, *Christmas Eve Address, 1952*, p. 114.

²⁷ Pius XI, Pope, encyclical letter, *Quadragesimo Anno*, n. 994 ff.

control. Hence social justice requires that a farmer cooperate with his neighbors in the establishment of farm organizations and likewise that in his business transactions he adhere to the policy of the groups to which he belongs. The right institutional framework is necessary to facilitate the practice of social justice.

The need for vocational groups is seen also in the difficulty the national government faces in determining agricultural policy and legislation. Under present conditions it cannot turn to any one organization of farmers, or, for that matter, to any one organization of wheat growers for authoritative recommendations in what concerns all farmers or all wheat growers. The vocation plan calls for one organization representing agriculture, one representing steel and in like manner organizations representing the other industries. In steel, for example, capital, management and labor would be in one group, although they would continue to meet separately, as in the labor union. This plan rests on the principle of subsidiary function, which states that it is a disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.²⁸

Implementation of this revolutionary plan will be gradual, involving much experimentation. Existing elements of economic organization will have to be incorporated into it. On August 3, 1948, the Parliament of Belgium took a cautious first step and provided in its legislation for a central economic council, industry-wide councils and local councils in each business unit of a certain size. The scheme includes other groups and integrates existing groups, like chambers of commerce and chambers of crafts and guilds.

The latest papal social encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*,²⁹ refers to this plan of Pius XI and notes that it calls for the establishment of a juridical order, with appropriate public and private institutions, inspired by social justice. In a section devoted to agriculture it makes a number of practical suggestions tailored precisely to the farm enterprise of the family type. The proposed organizations would have as their purpose strengthening the family-type farm financially and updating its methods of agriculture through a knowledge of the latest techniques of farming.

²⁸ Pius XI, Pope, *op. cit.*, n. 991. Pius XI states this principle as follows: "Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do."

²⁹ John XXIII, Pope, *op. cit.*, n. 37-40.

Cooperatives³⁰ should be organized to complement and perfect artisan and farm enterprises of the family type.³¹

As a means of helping the family secure sufficient money income for decent and humane family living he recommends that farmers form mutual-aid societies and professional associations.³² "All these are very necessary," the encyclical states, "either to keep rural dwellers abreast of scientific and technical progress or to protect the prices of goods produced by their labor. Besides acting in this manner, farmers are put on the same footing as other classes of workers who, for the most part, join in such fellowships. Finally, by acting thus farmers will achieve an importance and influence in public affairs proportionate to their own role."³³ This statement of purposes gives some indication of what type of farm organization is envisioned and offers a basis for evaluating our own existing ones. The encyclical stresses that the farmers themselves are to be the principal agents and protagonists of economic improvement, of cultural betterment or of social advance.

The rural community is also to be regarded as an important part of the social structure. Rural industry greatly strengthens this social and economic unit. The NCRLC devoted its 1960 policy statement to this subject. In this recommendation and in many others the NCRLC anticipated the recommendations of *Mater et Magistra* issued in May of 1961. The encyclical urges the development in rural areas of industries and services that are useful in preserving, processing and transporting farm products so that opportunity may be given farm families to supplement their incomes without leaving the milieu wherein they live and work. Local work has obvious economic, social and moral advantages over the system that requires commuting long distances.

In these practical recommendations of *Mater et Magistra* there is embodied an important principle of social philosophy — the principle of self-sufficiency. Thomas Aquinas observed that self-sufficiency is a mark of perfection. Applying this criterion to the 13th-century towns of his day he wrote "that city is more self-sufficient which the surrounding country supplies with all its vital needs than is another which must obtain these supplies by trade."³⁴ The self-sufficient city is more dignified; and in

³⁰ The Latin text reads: "*incepta oeconomica consociata.*"

³¹ John XXIII, Pope, *op. cit.*, n. 85.

³² The Latin text reads: "*adiutrices societates et consociationes ad artes pertinentes.*"

³³ John XXIII, Pope, *op. cit.*, n. 141, 146, 144.

³⁴ Aquinas, Thomas, "The Governance of Rulers," Sheed and Ward, New York, 1938, pp. 116-17.

time of war it is safer,³⁵ a reason that has not lost its cogency today when men are talking about decentralization.

From the viewpoint of this principle of self-sufficiency, a town-country unit, strengthened by rural industry, offers many advantages. It brings the rural industrial worker close to the food supply; it augments the farmer's income needed to secure a standard of living comparable to that in the city; and it gives to the rural community a certain measure of economic independence which, in turn, gives a measure of autonomy in education and culture. What is envisioned here is a blend of industrial efficiency and rural tranquility, an economically and culturally integrated town-country unit giving organic structure to the social body. The rural areas development project has demonstrated the possibility of achieving this.

In regard to the role of the state I wish merely to emphasize its obligations in distributive justice and equity to agriculture. It must bring about an improvement in the principal services needed in rural areas: roads, medical service, schools, housing. It must make capital available at a reasonable rate of interest. In other words, it must redress obvious imbalances between agriculture and the other sectors of the economy.

The Social Virtues

The organic structuring of rural society will require a re-activating of the social virtues in the farmer and a rooting out of that exaggerated individualism that has given a false orientation to modern social philosophy. He must relearn the law of human solidarity and charity which is dictated and imposed by our common origin, by the equality of rational nature in all men and by the redeeming sacrifice offered by Jesus Christ on behalf of mankind. The farmer must also be conscious of the solidarity that should exist among those sharing a common occupation and a common fatherland. He must come to understand the deeper meaning of the common good, which the ancients said is more lovable to the individual than his private good. The farmer must cooperate with his neighbor in true Christian friendship. He must do this even to the point of sacrificing personal advantage for the wider good of the group, as he may be called upon to do, for example, in behalf of the community creamery or of a marketing agency seeking a just price for his produce. Professional associations, mutual-aid-societies and cooperatives cannot

³⁵ Ibid.

function effectively unless the members have an enlightened social consciousness. The farmer must practice social justice, i.e., common-good justice, which demands from each individual all that is necessary for the common good. This demands that he use his land in a socially responsible way, that he join with his neighbor in mutual-aid societies, that in buying and selling he be faithful to the social commitments he has made to his fellow farmers.

The rural values such as reverence for the soil, love of God, love of the fatherland, willing acceptance of honest toil and love of the commonweal are fundamentally spiritual and cannot be maintained for long on any other basis. These qualities should be esteemed above the technological and the economic. They are essential for maintaining an organic social structure based upon freedom and personal responsibility. They are part of an authentic rural spirit. As such, they are of great importance, even from the purely economic point of view. In this country, where agriculture quotas are constantly being exceeded, we simply assume that the nation will always be blessed with a class of people who are willing and proud to do a farmer's work. It is possible that materialism and the love of ease which it engenders could over a long period invalidate this assumption. It is in this way that great nations, because of their wealth, deteriorate from within.³⁶

Can rural life, in the face of the aggressive influence of materialistic industrial capitalism maintain its specific identity? We are talking of a new kind of materialism, namely, technology with a materialistic outlook. It judges in terms of the quantitative; its criterion of success is, in the last analysis, financial return. Desire for gain rather than human need determines how technology will deploy its forces, how human and natural resources, how labor and capital will be expended.³⁷ Naturally given to large-scale calculations, technology has for its own

³⁶ Even if this nation could dispense with most of its farmers, there would remain the question of whether it could remain strong without the type of man agriculture produces. Even now there are indications of a problem. *Today's Health* reports that some 17 million persons of our country have serious emotional problems. Mental illness has been called our number one disability. The cost for the professional care of mentally ill patients is some 3 billion dollars per year. (*Today's Health*, Oct., 1961.) President Kennedy, in his July 19, 1961, message on physical fitness observed that "the softening process of our civilization continues to carry on its persistent erosion." It is my opinion that this process could be retarded by instilling a more rational and Christian attitude toward work.

³⁷ Pius XII, Pope, Catholic International Congresses address, Social Study, Fri-bourg Union, and Social Action, Rome, June 3, 1950. Cf. also, Pius XII, address, Life of the Farmer, Nov. 15, 1946.

purposes developed a type of machine suited to large-scale agricultural enterprises. The result is an approach to agriculture that is quantitative, impersonal, utilitarian, mechanically efficient, interested in large tracts of land which lend themselves to methods of uniform cultivation.

It appears, then, that the goals and values in agricultural policy are under tension. If my analysis is correct, the spiritual outlook that characterizes a vital and distinctive rural way of life will find itself to be in opposition to the technological, utilitarian outlook that is dominant in the American economy. In this tension there is something of the opposition which Christ spoke of when he told His disciples that it is impossible to serve God and mammon. The question here, however, is not one of individual morality, not one of personal greed or materialism in the individual farmer's life. Rather it is one of social morality, of deciding which is the ultimate norm for determining goals and values in agriculture: will it be the ethical-religious norm or the technological-economic? Fortunately these are not opposed and cannot be. At times the two norms are seen to be in evident accord. Consider, for example, the important matter of land ownership. In the natural law perspective a wide distribution of land is urged as in keeping with human dignity. In this spirit the early settlers and later immigrants staked out claims, homesteaded and built their lives upon modest holdings in land and industry. The result has been an abundant food production such as the Collectivist experiment has not been able to achieve. Indeed, Soviet Russia has found it necessary, in order to increase food production, to grant to the peasants an acre-and-a-cow-type of farming. The resulting production is phenomenally large.³⁸ What our nation has done in the name of human dignity, the pragmatic Soviets have been forced to do by hard economic realities.

At other times, the two norms are in apparent conflict. Consider the matter of capital investment. The natural law viewpoint urges economic support of the family-size farm as conducive to the formation of the human person. On the other hand,

³⁸According to Lazar Volin this type of farming in 1959 accounted for close to one-half of the total Soviet meat and milk production, more than 80 percent of eggs, 46 percent of green vegetables, and nearly two-thirds of potato production. He noted that this produce came from but a "dwarf private sector" of Soviet agriculture. He attributes this to the peasants' strong attachment to their little private holdings and animals. He writes that it can hardly be disputed "that giantism militates against efficient farm management." Volin, Lazar, Soviet Agriculture: A Continuing Problem, in "Current History," November 1961, pp. 286-91. The 1961 National Peoples' Congress of Red China proposed the restoration of private incentive through permission for private plots as one means for solving their food crisis. Yuan-Li Wu, Farm Crisis in Red China, in "Current History," September 1962, p. 166.

so-called prudent business practice favors capital loans to the large operator, for whom capital is made readily available and at a lower rate of interest. Obviously, here there is tension calling for a difficult decision, which more often than not is made on the side of expediency. While merely paying lip service to the ethical-religious norm, the practical man determines his goal on the basis of hard economic realities. As a consequence, our social policy drifts as we move from one short-term goal to the next. Marx was more consistent and decisive in his professedly and thoroughly materialistic philosophy. The economic factor was the decisive one. He branded the ethical-religious consideration as an opium for the people. Though we emphatically reject his philosophy that denies God and the human spirit, we must recognize a consistency in his pattern of goals and values that makes for a strong and effective public policy.

On our part, I think it can be said that we have neither accepted nor rejected the implications of an ethical-religious norm. This ambiguity in regard to norms, goals and values weakens our Christian position, takes the edge off the effectiveness of our social thought and prevents us from presenting to the world the image of a social order that clearly excels in justice, charity and humanity. This ambiguity also will have its effect upon rural life and cause it to become something other than what it is envisioned to be in the Catholic perspective; and in the process of this change I think that important spiritual values will be lost to our nation.

In outlining the Catholic perspective on rural life, I have stressed the following propositions:

1. The natural law outlook is essentially a recognition that human affairs are under Divine ordering. Human reason is competent to discover this ordering through a reading of human nature in its essential parts and relations, a reading which must take into account social change. Finally, this faith in human reason, as illuminated by Divine revelation, provides our pluralistic society with a basis for agreement in working out a solution for the social and agricultural question.
2. Rural life properly retains a specific character in relation to the urban outlook; the influence of the rural character upon the national character is of great importance.
3. Work is an important and essential factor in perfecting the human person. Agricultural work is eminently in keeping with man's nature as a creative and responsible being.
4. Technology, not as such, but as influenced by a materialistic spirit orientated almost exclusively to quantitative considerations, works harm to the human spirit and is a threat to the specific values of the rural way of life.

5. Social structure is the important factor in the rural question. The elements of structure are the family, the institution of a well distributed private property and the state. These are of critical importance in forming the person.

6. The structure of agricultural society must be kept organic, i.e., it must have a stability and vitality based upon smaller functioning units like the family farm and the town-country unit, which, in turn, are strengthened by such organizations as mutual-aid societies, professional organizations and cooperatives.

7. There is need to think through and apply the implications of our ethical-religious norms to the market place and countryside. This is a work for educators, statesmen, farmers and farm organizations.