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Reorganization in Freedom

LEO A. CULLUM

ONE of the distinguishing marks of our age is a widespread effort to bring to the individual man and his family a decent living. It is not easy to define a decent living, and the details would differ in different societies, but we may for our purpose accept the definition or description given by Pius XII, when he addressed an assemblage of Italian workers in 1943. He told them that a living wage would

assure a family a manner of life in which the parents could fulfil their natural duty of raising children with healthy nourishment, with clothing and a dwelling worthy of a human being; which moreover would make possible sufficient instruction for the children and a suitable education, with provision for future emergencies, for illness and old age.¹

This preoccupation to raise the condition of less fortunate men is in our day national and international, and as Barbara Ward has pointed out, is in a certain sense something new in the world.

In practice this effort has found expression in organized assistance, some of it of private inspiration, much of it a state activity. And this latter fact introduces a problem which is as disturbing as the growing altruism is consoling.

At the same time that the state tenders wider and wider assistance to the individual citizens, it assumes, almost perforce, wider and wider jurisdiction over their lives. And the

¹ AAS 35 (1943), 173.

ultimate term is a situation in which the omnipotent state will dole out *panem et circenses* to an utterly cowed citizenry.

This is an impasse that is real. On the one hand the individual receiving, and deservedly receiving, more and more attention; on the other that same individual shrinking daily in his human dimensions, becoming more and more dependent, less and less a free man. Chief Justice Bengzon in a recent address to the Civil Liberties Union discussed this problem. He said:

Gone is the freedom to contract on certain matters; gone is the right to own and retain large tracts of land; gone is the employer's right to engage laborers on his own terms; gone is the landowner's privilege to change his tenants at will or to fix his rents; gone is the freedom to export or import according to business needs, —to mention only a few . . . Not that I deplore the loss of such rights. Not that I plead for their restoration. I merely cite to illustrate. . . . Inevitably the trend toward more government and less liberty goes on. The expansion of population and the progress of civilization demand new regulations and controls. Where this will eventually lead, it would be foolhardy to predict.²

In the words of the Chief Justice we see the dilemma. He does not deny that government control is indicated in certain areas, but he is troubled about the tendency and its pace. "Where will this eventually end?" is his apprehensive query.

This dilemma has been faced by John XXIII in the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*. The Pope has described at considerable length a phenomenon of our times which translators have called "socialization." According to the Encyclical:

One of the characteristic features of our epoch is socialization. By this term is meant the growing interdependence of men in society, giving rise to various patterns of group life and activity, and in many instances to social institutions established on a juridical basis. (59)³

Socialization is wider than government action; it includes all those influences which in one way or another sweep a man

² *The Journal of the American Chamber of Commerce* XXXVIII (Dec. 1962), 637.

³ AAS 53 (1961) 401-464. Numbers in parentheses refer to the America Press English translation.

along on a general current, making his decisions for him and moulding his thinking for him. Its essence is understood from the danger inherent in it, which was put into a question by the Pope: "Ought it to be concluded, then, that socialization, growing in extent and depth, necessarily reduces men to automats?" (62).

If socialization is wider than government intervention, certainly government intervention is a significant phase of it, and it is precisely this phase we wish to discuss: "the growing intervention of the state in areas which, since they touch the deepest concerns of the human person, are not without considerable importance nor devoid of danger." (60)

Mater et Magistra faces this problem, and while not passing judgement on the degree of state intervention that exists today, nevertheless accepts the trend with equanimity, and affirms that there is no reason why citizens cannot within it retain their dignity as free men.

Because of its complacent attitude towards state intervention, *Mater et Magistra* has been designated by some a "liberal" encyclical, in the modern usage of that term. One newspaper headlined it as approving the Welfare State. There is a grain of truth in these qualifications as there is a grain of good in the Welfare State. But distinctions are called for.

The first thing to remark is that the importance of the *individual* and of *individual enterprise* is emphasized in the papal document. When towards the end of the encyclical the Pope undertakes to sum up his teaching, his first words are: "The fundamental principle in this doctrine is that *individual* and of *individual enterprise* is emphasized in the and the reason for the existence of all social institutions." (219)

In speaking of labor relations John XXIII made his own the teaching of Leo XIII and Pius XII that it is primarily a responsibility of individuals to regulate these relations, and only in the event that the interested parties

are unwilling or unable to fulfill their functions, does it "fall back on the state to intervene." (44)

The active participation of the private citizen is indispensable for a prosperous and well-ordered society. Without this there is tyranny and economic stagnation. (57) In agriculture, about which the Pope is so seriously pre-occupied, the encyclical says: "the farmers themselves as the interested parties ought to take the initiative and play an active role in promoting their own economic advancement, social progress and cultural betterment." (144)

Elsewhere in urging the development of depressed areas the encyclical says: "Special effort must also be made to see to it that workers in underdeveloped areas are conscious of playing a key role in the promotion of their personal socio-economic and cultural betterment. . . . It is necessary that private enterprise, also, should contribute its share to bringing about a just economic balance among the different regions of the same country. And indeed public authorities, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, ought to encourage and aid the efforts of private enterprise. As far as circumstances allow, this should involve permitting private citizens to carry on to completion the task of economic development." (151, 152)

It is evident therefore that the Holy Father does not undervalue the importance of the individual person and of private enterprise in the plans he recommends for the socio-economic reorganization of human society.

On the other hand the encyclical underscores the need of intervention by the state in order to bring about the desired socio-economic improvements. This is said early and often, both in quoting previous popes and in presenting new thoughts on the subject under discussion. John XXIII rejects, with Leo XIII, the *laissez-faire* principle that the state should not intervene in economic affairs. It would be tiresome to list all the passages. Let a few suffice:

The state, whose very reason for existence is the realization of the common good in the temporal order, cannot keep aloof from the

economy. It should be present to promote in a suitable manner the production of a sufficient supply of material goods the use of which is necessary for the practice of virtue, and to watch over the rights of all citizens. . . . It has also the inflexible duty of contributing actively to the betterment of the worker's standard of living. (20)

In fact one of the occasions of writing the encyclical was precisely the "more frequent and extensive intervention by public authorities in the economic and social fields," not indeed to condemn it but to suggest principles for the avoidance of excess. (49) The Pope suggests in considerable detail how the state should act to remedy the problems of small business men and farmers. And at the very beginning of his own positive message he lays down as a fundamental principle that "public authorities also must play an active role in promoting increased productivity with a view to social progress and the welfare of all citizens." (52)

While the encyclical accepts therefore as right in principle the positive role of the state, it does not necessarily label as ideal the particular degree of participation which in fact exists. It is silent on that point and is content to indicate the principles upon which government action must be based. But let no mistake be made, the Pope is very sensitive to the fact that there is danger of excess. He says:

Socialization multiplies institutional structures and extends more and more to minute details the juridical control of human relations in every walk of life. As a consequence, it restricts the range of an individual's freedom of action. It uses means, follows methods and creates an atmosphere which make it difficult for one to reach judgements free from external pressures, to work on his own initiative, to exercise responsibility and to assert and enrich his personality. (62)

What then is the solution? On the one side is the Charybdis of individualism in which the state holds aloof and allows the individual to be victimized by the powerful and wealthy. On the other is the Scylla of totalitarianism in which the individual is dehumanized, becomes a ward of the state, stripped of his rights and liberty.

The solution is to be found in the rules laid down for the government's participation. The government has a role to play, an important role. But it must be played rever-

ently, to save and not to enslave, to protect rights and liberties, not to absorb them.

The first principle is very general but it reveals the germ of truth which is in the slogan: "the less government the better." This cry is still heard, an echo from classical liberalism, and apparently some do not doubt that it expresses exactly a clear and sacred truth. It is not a truth; it is a half-truth, or a bad expression of a whole truth. In its false meaning it implies that *any* government intervention is evil, and if circumstances demand some such intervention, that is an evil merely to be tolerated. This is based on a false Rousseauvian idea of the state.

In what sense is the dictum true? The state has a positive role to enact which is good and of the very nature of social life. But its role is *subsidiary*. Man and the family are integrated into society to be *helped*, to have the limitations of their own forces supplemented. The purpose of the state is defined as the Common Good or Public Prosperity. And this means that the state must create that climate in which the private individual and the family can work out their own personal and family welfare. This encyclical describes it as "all those conditions which permit men to pursue more readily the integral development of their personalities." (65) The Common Good therefore is not the good of all the citizens, nor of the state, but the diversified fund of opportunities and advantages at the service of the total citizenry from which individuals and groups may draw for their own perfection. It embraces a great variety of things, from roads and ports and schools, through a sound fiscal condition and a body of just laws, to imponderables like the level of public morality.⁴ Its implementation is elastic, varying with conditions and needs, but whatever the state does, it must never do anything that the individual or a lower organization can do substantially as well. The state's role is to supplement, not replace the individual and smaller organizations in their social and economic activities. In that sense it is true that "the less government the better."

⁴Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good* (1947), 42-44.

However the encyclical is not content with this general principle of subsidiarity, but gives two more rules for the activity of the state in the affairs of its citizens. The first we may dispose of quickly. It is that those in government must have a true idea of the common good. (65) We have just seen what it is. Government officials must realize that their role is to provide favorable conditions for the best possible intellectual, material, moral and religious development of all citizens. This supposes a high degree of integrity and public-spiritedness in the officials. But without this no rules will work and no efforts be successful. If this is lacking we are no longer dealing with a true political society—which by its very nature must seek the common good—but with a spurious imitation of a state. Therefore no great intelligence is needed to see that any solution of economic problems requires a high degree of honesty, integrity and public-mindedness in the rulers, and an intelligent understanding of their task.

The real key to the problem however is in the second rule, namely in the promotion of relatively autonomous institutions intermediate between the state and the individual or family:

We consider it necessary that the intermediate groups and numerous social enterprises through which socialization tends to express itself should enjoy an effective autonomy. (65)

Mater et Magistra is obviously referring here to what Pius XI had urged very earnestly, the establishment of industry councils: “the reconstruction of human society by setting up intermediate bodies having their own economic and occupational goals—bodies not imposed by the state at its own discretion but created by their respective members.” (37)

The idea of the industry council, as these intermediate groups came to be called, was of an industry-wide association with representation from all sectors of the industry in question, —from ownership, management, manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, workers of all kinds: industrial, office, sales-force. This organization would democratically regulate

its own industry always with an eye on the common good, as it was to be served by their restricted area of the economy. The government would support and make its own the regulations arrived at by the Council.

This is a brief and sketchy description of this proposed solution. Many industries, possessing each its own Council, would unite to harmonize the whole economy for the good of all concerned. What is striking about this is that in the scheme there is preservation of the two values at stake. The individual preserves his liberties by being himself in this democratic organization the architect of his own conditions. On the other hand there is organization to guard against the evils of individualism, with government participation as a measure of final vigilance and of juridical support for policy.

Cronin writing on this second rule for properly moderating government influence says:

This second requirement is a restating of a major principle that was the very heart of the social teaching of Pius XI. It calls for the existence of a large number of organizations, dedicated to the pursuit of the common good in economic society, yet substantially independent of the civil state. Such buffer groups allow for the effective decentralization of power, thus avoiding the opposite evils of statism and selfish individualism.⁵

And in another passage the same author, after pointing out that dangers exist both in state action on the economy and in individualism (even when this is organized in groups), says:

These dangers could be minimized or avoided if the duty of regulating industries and professions for the common good were entrusted to a group of intermediary bodies. These would be composed of all members of an industry or profession, and would thus differ from groups based on special interests, such as labor unions or employer associations. They would have real power to make and enforce regulations for the common good of the industry, relieving political society of excessive burdens. Since these groups would be

⁵ John F. Cronin in a commentary on *Mater et Magistra* which appeared in installments in the *Sunday Visitor* during 1962. This passage is from the second installment.

democratic in structure, power would be more evenly diffused in society.⁶

This is the Industry Council Plan of Pius XI. It would be going beyond the text of *Mater et Magistra* to say that John XXIII urges it fully as presented by Pius XI. The present pope is silent about *unitary structure*, but he strongly urges the principles. The principle is self-regulation by democratically constituted groups, reflecting a cross-section of an industry, reconciling their own particular objectives with the common good and receiving encouragement, help and authority from the state.

To give an example of this principle at work, an educational accrediting association is such an action in one restricted area of education, at the level of standards. An accrediting association is composed democratically of member schools, legislates for its own problems, with the government accepting and supporting its findings. Thus on the one hand excessive government control is avoided with consequent preservation of the liberties of parents and schools; on the other hand the evils of complete *laissez-faire* are effectively met.

Though labor unions and chambers of commerce and the like do not fit into the structure of an industry council in its pure conception, there does not seem to be any reason why their cooperation could not be asked and given in the spirit of the encyclical. The important thing is that the government stimulate, aid and support various areas of the economy in taking stock of their activities and in organizing for democratic group action in order to promote their own legitimate interests in harmony with the good of the whole society.

Thus the desperate dilemma of Justice Bengzon is met. As far as the citizen surrenders his liberty of action, it will be to a body of which he is a member, democratically deciding policies. In so far as the government intervenes it will be largely to promote programs decided upon by the citizens themselves.

⁶ *Ibid.*

The *Journal of the American Chamber of Commerce* concludes its article on Justice Bengzon's address with the following words:

It is beginning to be understood more clearly than ever before that the growing complexity of civilization calls for better organization, it is true, but organization in freedom.⁷

This could almost be made the sub-title of one section of *Mater et Magistra*: "organization in freedom." If this is carried out with a true understanding of human nature and the nature of civil society, we have nothing to fear. John XXIII says:

As long as socialization is kept within these limits of the moral order, it will not of its nature seriously restrict individuals or overburden them. Instead, it offers hope of promoting in them the expression and development of their personal characteristics. It results too in an organic reconstruction of society, which our predecessor, Pius XI, in *Quadragesimo Anno* put forward and defended as the indispensable prerequisite for satisfying abundantly the demands of social justice. (67)

⁷ *l.c.*