

Capitalism, teaching that to be attached to riches was sinful and that poverty was a condition for going to Heaven. He was followed by the Apostles, the Fathers of the early Church, and the faithful, so that the first Christian Churches were societies of Communists. Not, they say, until Christianity became the fashionable religion of the Roman Empire did the Church change her views to suit altered circumstances, as, indeed, she had already done in the great trading centres of Egypt, under Clement of Alexandria. Clement, according to Nitti, accommodated the Gospel of Christ concerning riches to the requirements of a rich commercial community; and we are told that the medieval and modern Church adopted his views from that time to this.

The charge that the Church has changed her doctrine is an old one. It is the same charge as was made by the Reformers, and is still made by their successors in our time. Cardinal Newman studied the problem for years before becoming a Catholic, satisfying himself that the charge was false, and that what was called change was only vital and natural development. People outside of the Church fail to grasp the distinction between precepts and counsels and much confusion springs from this error. The Protestant theory that all that is good is of precept and that nothing is merely recommended as a higher course has found its way among all who depend on Protestant literature; and consequently we find the view repeated by Socialist writers who, knowing nothing of Bible criticism themselves, depend for their information on traditional Protestant views. For example, they cannot distinguish between the precepts and the counsels in the case of the rich young man whom Christ told to keep the Commandments if he would enter into life, and upon further query as to what good might be done, told him to sell all his goods and give the proceeds to the poor. Instead of proving, as Socialists say, that Christ laid down poverty as a necessary condition for Heaven this narrative proves exactly the contrary. "If thou wouldst have everlasting life, keep the Commandments"—that is, the Ten Commandments of the Decalogue in which there is nothing against riches and no insisting on the necessity of poverty. Then comes the counsel: "If thou wouldst be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give it to the poor." That is, if the young man wanted to lead a life of higher perfection than that to which ordinary Christians are called he was to sell his goods and give to the poor. Note that he was not told to give to a common fund from which the poor were to draw at need. It is clearly implied that the money derived from the sale was to be his to give or to hold as he pleased. For the Apostles, St. Paul may be taken as a representative witness. In his instructions to Timothy he tells him how to deal with the rich, but he does not tell him that they must renounce their wealth or give it into a common fund. From the New Testament we can gather that there was for a time a system of holding all in common in the Church at Jerusalem. We can also infer that it was local and temporary, and in no wise of obligation. And as for the instances brought forward by writers to support the contention of Socialists, we usually find that they stop short of the important points and quote only as much as suits them: another relic of Protestantism. In parables one must distinguish what is figurative and symbolic from what is essential, and one must be careful not to base arguments on what is merely *ad ornamentum*. Thus, the narrative which says that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go to Heaven only teaches that riches are a burden which makes winning Heaven difficult in ordinary circumstances. Indeed, one interpretation refers the "eye of a needle" to a gate in the city walls so called and so low that camels had to be rid of some of their load before passing through it. But even if that be not the true interpretation, what follows (and what Socialists omit) makes it clear that Our Lord meant something very different from what Socialists say He meant. The disciples asked Him: "Who then can be saved?" "With men," said Our

Lord, "this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." The meaning of this is that with God's grace even the rich man may be saved. And, of course, if the possession of riches were sinful and essentially wrong God's grace would not come to the rich as long as they remained in a sinful and wrong way of life.

With reference to Communism in the early Church, Tertullian may be quoted to prove that the right of private property was recognised. He says in his *Apologia*: "Though we have our treasure chest, it is not made up of purchase money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly collection-day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it pleases him, and only if he is able; *all is voluntary*." In O'Brien's *Medieval Economic Teaching*, Bergier is quoted as saying: "Towards the end of the first century St. Barnabas; in the second, St. Justin and St. Lucian; in the third, St. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, St. Cyprian; in the fourth, Arnobius and Lactantius, say that among the Christians all goods are common; there was then certainly no question of a community of goods taken in the strict sense." Here we have Tertullian mentioned as one who writes of community of goods, while we have just seen that he clearly recognises private property. Consequently, the community of goods in the early Church was a very different thing from Communism as understood by modern Socialists. O'Brien says: "It is therefore doubtful if the Church at Jerusalem, as described in the Acts, practised Communism at all, as apart from great liberality and benevolence. Assuming, however, that the Acts should be interpreted in their strict literal sense, let us see to what the so-called Communism amounted. In the first place, it is plain from the Acts (iv. 32) that the Communism was one of use, not of ownership. . . . This distinction is particularly important in view of the fact that it is precisely that insisted on by St. Thomas Aquinas. . . . In the next place, we must observe that the Communism described in the Acts was purely voluntary. . . . There is no indication that the abandonment of one's possessory rights was preached by the Apostles. Indeed, it would be difficult to understand why they should have done so, when Christ Himself had remained silent on the subject. Far from advocating Communism, the Founder of Christianity had urged the practice of many virtues for which possession of private property was essential." As for the passages which are adduced from the Fathers of the Church, Mr. Devas says (*Dublin Review*, January, 1898): "The mistake of representing the early Christian Fathers of the Church as rank Socialists is frequently made by those who are friendly to modern Socialism; the reason for it is that either they have taken passages from their context, and without due regard to the circumstances in which they were written, and the meaning they would have conveyed to their hearers; or else, by a grosser blunder, the perversions of heretics are set forth as the doctrine of the Church, and a sad case arises of mistaken identity." For a comprehensive account of the opinions of the Fathers we refer our readers to *Medieval Economics*, pp. 41-101. We conclude by saying that Communism was not taught by Christ, nor by the Apostles, nor by the early Fathers, and that it was not practised, as the Socialists understand it, in the early Christian communities. The right of private property was recognised and upheld while at the same time charity and benevolence were preached and practised, and poverty was represented as being, all things considered, a better state than wealth. We do not say that Churchmen did not at times show undue favor to the rich; we do not say that some such are not among us still; but we say that the doctrine of the Church has not changed although it may have developed as a tree develops from the plant without losing its oneness and continuity.

Give me the eye which can see God in all, and the hand which can serve God in all, and the heart which can bless Him for all.—Lecker.

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