

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## ART. III.—SOCIALISM AND THE PAPACY.

NO doubt a good many people were startled when they noticed that, in May, 1891, Pope Leo XIII. had issued an encyclical on the condition of workmen. In the first place, the very fact of his appearance in the arena of bitter present-day politics was somewhat of a novelty. The recluse of the Vatican was supposed to be yearning after his temporal possessions, and to possess no interest in political affairs beyond his own "rights." Certainly Pio Nono would never have thrust out his head to speak to the proletariat. But, besides this, it became manifest that the Pope was dangling his sympathy, if not altogether his support, before the eyes of the workers, and they were adjured to believe that the traditional claims of Christianity to uphold the cause of the oppressed would be still maintained, and would be set in motion by the whole power of Romanism. Language was used that spoke with all the magic of a mystic authority to assure the plebeians that what they had been vainly struggling for would be only possible with the co-operation of the See of Peter, and, further, would be attained if that alliance were adopted. This from Rome—the traditionally conservative Rome! It is true that "we are all Socialists now," even the German Emperor; but still, that the great Church which was imagined to remain like a column unmoved amid all the dust and breezes of successive political strife should thus, by her official mouthpiece, pay deferential respect to the supposed subverters of law and order, was to some minds little short of astounding.

Yet really the thing is capable of very easy explanation. We might imagine that the acute Italian would not publish his sympathy unless the time were fully ripe, nor declare anything that could be unequivocally construed in a sense adverse to himself. What the Pope says, he says from many reasons, and with many meanings. We propose to examine the causes that led up to the encyclical, and to discuss the propositions that it contains, when it will be seen, we think, that the Pope could hardly help writing it, and that it really means very little.

Perhaps the first pressing appeal to the Papacy on this question came from France. Twice in this century has Paris knocked at the gates of Rome to demand its aid in the reform of social matters. We should expect this, for anyone in France who wishes to be heard must speak with a proletarian accent; and when Romanists, who love their Church and love their country too, wish to see them reconciled, they must of

necessity adopt the cause of democracy in politics, in order to get the democracy in return to adopt their creed in religion. We need neither deny to many of these "Liberal Catholics" a sincere belief in the righteousness of the workers' cry. If it was policy with some, it was certainly conviction with others.

The first to claim the help of the Roman Pontiff for the working classes was Saint-Simon. It is true he did not speak as an ardent Roman Catholic, but he wished for a social reformation, and he believed that the Roman Church could effect it. In his "Nouveau Christianisme" he demonstrated to the Pope that to keep his empire over the poor he must obtain the management of the great social reform which was in store.

But where Saint-Simon was heard with distrust, Lamennais and his school were listened to with affection, at all events in the early part of their movement. In his opinion the success of the New Catholicism would be assured if it were allied with the New Democracy. He urged the Pope to set himself at the head of both, in his "Essai sur l'indifférence." We know that the Papacy was not yet primed to receive such counsels, and Lamennais had to choose between the priest and the Socialist. He chose the latter, but for long he bankered after his old ideal, which found a tumultuous vent in the "Paroles d'un croyant." His friends followed him afar off. The traces of his democratic teaching always remained in Lacordaire's preaching. "Passons aux barbares et suivons Pie IX.," wrote Ozanam. Montalembert declared himself ready to descend into the arena to claim entire political and social liberty. Gratry wrote, with almost feverish hope, of the abolition of poverty. It is true that Pius IX. after 1848 would have nothing to do with these Utopians. His heart was filled with distrust of the democracy which had taken away his temporal power. They required a new pope and a new Rome, but meanwhile they had spoken.

Later on, the impulse to Rome came from other quarters. In fact, Rome was not pushed, but dragged. Many of her sons did not wait for her word of command, but marched off. In Germany Ketteler, Bishop of Mayence, entered into social questions with fervour and in a practical spirit alike. To meet the *Kulturkampf* the Romanists were obliged to make common cause with the workers of Westphalia and Silesia, and by their aid alone Windthorst defeated his foe of Friedrichsruhe. In America Cardinals Ireland and Gibbons upheld the "Knights of Labour." In our own country the astute Manning constituted himself the dockers' champion, and in France, again, Cardinal Lavignerie is telling the Romanists "not to be afraid to sing the Marseillaise, or put the 'R. F.' on their houses."

All these different voices have been calling to Leo XIII., some of them very imperiously, and though, no doubt, the mere fact of their summons would not be in itself sufficient, yet when he looked around on the state of affairs, to judge for himself, what would he see?

The interests of princes and the interests of popes seem no longer to hang together. Kaisers and czars, monarchs and chancellors, do very little for St. Peter's See nowadays. If it were the democracy of Italy that upset the Pope, they put the King at the head of the movement. The old days when the Bishop of Rome was a temporal sovereign, courting alliance with, and conferring favours upon, his brother kings, are gone never to return; and so far are the conditions changed that, except, perhaps, in Austria and the Spanish Peninsula, European monarchs regard the Papacy with either indifference or hostility. But besides this, what scruple can affect the Holy See in raising social questions when she perceives kings themselves engage in discussing them in order to refurbish the paling lustre of their crowns? We have in Germany a monarch of mechanics—why not in Italy a pope of proletarians? If it is worth trying for the young Kaiser, it ought to be for the old Pope; and momentous as the experiment is for the temporal ruler, it is more so for him who would combine with the temporal sovereignty a spiritual one as well. For there seems little doubt that by the democracy of the various countries the power of the Papacy must stand or fall. It is simply a question of counting heads. If the "wild mob's million feet" do not combine to kick the Pope from his pedestal, it is difficult to assign any period to his power; and *vice versa*, the moment the people of different nationalities pronounce against it, it is gone. Kings can at least combine with each other, but there is only one pope, and the kings seem no longer to regard him as one of their number. Such would be the upshot of his reflections.

Well, then, granting that the conditions no longer exist under which the Pope could look to the reigning monarchs of Europe as his natural allies, to whom must he look for support? It can only be to the democracy. Sovereigns are either indifferent or hostile, and besides that, there is no denying that according to that elusive but very real factor, the "spirit of the age," the power of things has shifted to the proletariat. That has long been the case in France, Switzerland, and the United States; it is so now in our own country, Italy, and, more or less, in all European states but Russia, which is out of the question as far as Romanism is concerned. The "old order" is still, in a sense, master of the situation, owing to prestige, wealth, and that *start* which comes from

centuries of previous power; but it is slowly changing, and the race will be to the new. Who is quicker to see the sign of the times than the subtle Roman? All "personages" are endeavouring to ingratiate themselves with the democracy—the Papacy must not be eclipsed.

Of course, it has been very different in times past. Then the Pope was a kind of Superintendent of Police for the district of Europe, and his clergy were "policemen in cassocks." Kings and all existing powers regarded the Roman Church as a watch-dog keeping a jealous eye over the masses on their behalf. Rome fulfilled the function well, and the democracy now, if it cared to read history, would find how she always repressed any generous outburst from beneath, and smothered any efforts at independence; so completely, in fact, that her present *volte-face* would rightly inspire a keen distrust. Unfortunately, the democracy do not read history, and the Papacy forgets it—when necessary. So now the very Church which stood as a sentinel before thrones aims at becoming a demagogue. What more striking proof could we have of the way in which power has shifted?

Since then this change has taken place, and that, too, to a degree of which we cannot yet even estimate the results, from the standpoint of policy the issue of the Papal encyclical was a good move on behalf of the Roman Church. It answers the ardent wishes of the most earnest of her sons; it cannot alienate crowned heads more than at present, and it may succeed in propitiating that unwieldy monarch whose strength lies hidden in the future.

So far so good—but we must ask ourselves, What does the Pope mean by Socialism? It is a truism to say that that word conveys different ideas to different people. It is a word that covers a multitude of meanings. In our own country it ranges through successive stages, from the anarchism which is happily almost non-existent, through democratic federations, Radical clubs, Fabian societies, drawing-room discussions, to Lord Salisbury's latest development, that of giving the nation a State-paid education of all its children. But through most of these ideas (and there is as yet no authoritative definition of Socialism) there runs one prominent feature. It is that of the State acting on behalf of the people. Let us examine three definitions by very different writers. Though they are English, yet the same idea is characteristic of Continental Socialism: "Socialism is a desire that the capricious gifts of nature may be intercepted by some agency having the power and the good-will to distribute them justly according to the labour done by each in the collective search for them. The means to its fulfilment is the social democratic state" ("Socialism,"

p. 4). This is the opinion of the comparatively moderate Fabian Society. Next let us take the view of an independent and by no means milk-and-watery Socialist: "The logical terminus (of Socialism) is the completion of the process of socialization, *i.e.*, the *complete* socialization not only of production but of exchange as well" ("Ethics of Socialism," p. 37).

We may close with the opinion of an unbiased and independent inquirer: "Such a system means the democratic control of government, central and local, and the co-operative control of industry by the free, intelligent, industrious people. In short, Socialism means democracy in politics; unselfishness, altruism, or Christian ethics; in economics, the principle of co-operation or association" ("Enquiry into Socialism," Kirkup, p. 185).

We have been thus particular in quoting passages to prove the fundamental idea of Socialism—the interference of a democratic State in everything on behalf of the people, which no doubt our readers were perfectly well acquainted with already—because we wish to show that the Pope means a very different thing by that "Socialism" which commends itself to him. And here we would acknowledge our obligation to a recent work<sup>1</sup> by the well-known French writer on economics, M. Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu. It originally appeared, in three different parts, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*; and the author, writing from the standpoint of a moderate and liberal Roman Catholic, labours to convince his co-religionists that the time need never come for them to be pounded between the mortar of spiritual authority and the pestle of the new democracy. Into this we need not follow him, our aim being only to examine the teaching of the Pope in his encyclical.

The Encyclical of Leo XIII., "De conditione opificum," is of course in Latin throughout. It is not formally divided into divisions or chapters; that is not customary with these Papal pronouncements. None the less clearly does it fall into four natural divisions, without reckoning a rapid introduction and a short conclusion. The first part is devoted to the examination of Socialism; the second, to the social action of religion, and the consequent solution of the question by that means. (Of course everyone will understand that throughout the document the expression "religion" is arrogantly made synonymous with the action of the Roman Catholic Church.) The third section discusses the question of the part to be

<sup>1</sup> "La Papauté, le Socialisme, et la Démocratie," par A. Leroy-Beaulieu. Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1892. This has been ably translated by Professor O'Donnell of Dublin, and published by Messrs. Chapman and Hall, since this article was written.

played by the State: its intervention by means of social legislation; holidays; duration of working hours; wages, and so forth. The fourth and last division treats of industrial associations and corporations. It will be seen that, as regards practical matters apart from theological, historic, or academic questions, the crux of the encyclical lies in the third part. It is there that Socialists must turn to see what is given, and their opponents to learn what is withheld.

In the first part the Pope examines theoretic socialism, but only to condemn it. If his teaching have any sort of infallibility as regards social questions, it is difficult to understand how any Papist can henceforth call himself Socialist also. By Socialism he understands collectivism—that is to say, he accepts the word in perhaps its most usual meaning, of sacrificing individual rights to the general interest of the aggregate. In fact, he begins by a very clear definition that “Socialists pretend that possession of private property ought to be abolished, that all things ought to be had in common, and their administration entrusted either to the municipality or the State.”<sup>1</sup> Some would urge that this explanation is too harsh and crude, but, such as it is, it is certainly the one adopted by Leo XIII., and in any case it is interesting to observe his opinion, if merely as that of a trained intellect with unusual facilities for grasping the situation.

If, therefore, any of the leaders of the movement in England fondly imagine they have the power of the Papacy at their back, it would seem that they are grievously mistaken. For having first defined, he goes on to shatter this system of collectivism. The right of private property has never enjoyed a more vigorous champion. He upholds alike the possession of capital, in opposition to Marx, and of land, in opposition to Henry George. Naturally the arguments and details of this part of the encyclical are philosophical and academic. There is nothing unusual about them, certainly nothing new or brilliant, almost what one would expect to find in an essay against Socialism read at a mutual improvement society. We cannot, for questions of space, examine all the points in detail, and indeed it is unnecessary, but it is interesting to quote the closing remark of what we have termed the Pope's inquiry into Socialism. We translate:

From all these reasons it is manifest that the Socialist theory of collective property is absolutely to be condemned (*omnino repudiari oportere*), as it is injurious to the very people whom it is sought to benefit, contrary to the natural rights of individuals, and dangerous to good government and the public tranquillity. Let it, therefore, be

<sup>1</sup> *Socialista quidem, evertere privatas bonorum possessiones contendunt oportere, earumque loco communia universis singulorum bona facere; procurantibus viris qui aut municipio præsint, aut totam rempublicam gerant.*

established that when the improvement of the people is desired the foremost thing to be considered is the inviolability of private property.

There cannot be much doubt about *this*, and one could wish that some of our impulsive English writers, who are always prating about the "generous Socialism" of the "Catholic" Church, in contradistinction to the hard individualism of the Established Church in England, would take the trouble to find out what the sovereign Pontiff really does think—and say. Whether the leading ethical idea of modern Socialism—the holding of goods by all for the advantage of each—be a Divine dream, or a hideous delusion, and it is not within the scope of this article to discuss the question, no one could more sharply define it as the latter than the head of the Roman Church.

But the Pope admits the social evils of to-day: paints them, indeed, in colours which to many minds would seem exaggerated. Therefore he proceeds to discuss how best they may be remedied, and with the treatment of this question we arrive at the second division of his encyclical. Now there is no denying that here he treads common ground with most of us. He finds, as indeed all Christian people do, the true medicine for the sickness of the times in a better adoption and a wider extension of Christian principles. Much of his language, no doubt, is vague and misty, written, so it seems, with an eye for effect. All of the ideas are the common property of Christianity, though, of course, in the encyclical there is no such thing as Christianity outside of Romanism. The magnificent works of Protestantism in Germany, the piety, zeal, and devotion of the Anglican Church, the fervour and spirituality of the great Nonconforming bodies—all these might never have existed. All is Rome. Vain it is to issue solemn and pompous declamations about finding the surest means of healing social plagues by restoring the Christian ideal among the people while such a spirit obtains. It is no use to say, "Go to Christ and you will be healed," when it is meant, "Go to the Pope."

Again, we may content ourselves with quoting the concluding sentence of this section. After speaking of the alleviation of misery that can be affected by Christian charity, the following assertion is made:

The Church alone possesses the virtue of Christian charity, because it can only be derived from the sacred heart of Jesus Christ; but whoever is outside of the Church is wandering far away from Christ.

No doubt such teaching as this is repellent, not only to the Christian who shrinks from participating in Roman error, but to the mere man of the world, or the "honorary member of all religions." Yet, apart from such a stain, there is a good deal that is profitable and useful in this section, simply because



there is much, as we have said, that is the universal heritage of Christianity, and is well and forcibly expressed. The Pope, moreover, in beginning his next division, gives clear expression to a doubt which he shares with most thoughtful Christians. That is, how far will people in the mass accept Christian morality? Even though it may be conclusively proved that the Gospel is the best remedy for existing social evils, how far has the Gospel, as urged by man, the power to enforce itself? Obviously it has none, except over Christians, and Scripture expressly informs us that these will be the few, not the many. Therefore, though Christian morality is the only safeguard, who is to enforce it? If the world will not submit voluntarily to justice, who is to compel it? That is the great problem of our time, and expressed in different words it is this: How far is the State to interfere with the people?

Now, there is not one of us who does not recognise the right of the State to intervention in a certain degree. Setting aside such questions as the regulation of adult labour, distribution of wealth, possession of property, it is evident that no one refuses to the State its right of watching over and maintaining the privileges of all. It is not only its right but its duty to protect all, and especially those who are less capable than others of protecting themselves. The Pope accepts this principle:

The State, he says, must protect all classes of citizens, and that in the full exercise of its right (*idque jure suo optimo*), and without having to fear the reproach of interference, for by the very virtue of its office the State must serve the common interest.

Such is his general principle. And such, too, is ours, but it is only philosophical for most of us. Here theory is less important than practice. If the State has the right of intervening, what must be the conditions, and what ought to be the limits, of her intervention? In reality that is the whole question, for very few argue against the right, or, rather, the duty, of the State to protect the welfare of all classes. No man is an individualist out and out. All that separates him from the Socialist is the measure and amount of State interference. Now, as we have seen, the cardinal Socialist dogma is the control of the State in everything—politics, economics, and ethics. How does the Pope treat this?

Very cavalierly indeed. After having established the right of the State to intervention, he hastens to limit the right. This intervention must be exercised only where it is absolutely indispensable, where there is no other means of grappling with the evils of society, only as a last, and dangerous, resource. What are his own words?

If, then, the general interest, or the interest of one class in particular,

be either injured or threatened, and that it is impossible to remedy them or prevent them in any other way (*quod sanari aut prohiberi alia ratione non possit*), it is necessary to have recourse to public authority.

This is only a spirit of *pis-aller*, and it would be difficult indeed to claim the Pope in any way as a partisan of State authority. He is in direct antagonism to the leading formula of Socialism—what is termed the “providential State.” So far from regarding public government as a father to whom all classes should trust themselves, as being in the same family, the Pope regards it with dire suspicion. The encyclical proceeds to justify this opinion by many arguments. The individual, the family, private societies, are defended from absorption by the central authority. The language on this point is equally clear with that of the first section. There, Socialism in theory, *i.e.*, the possession of common property, is denounced; here, Socialism in practice, or entire State control, is no less vigorously condemned. But in what points, then, does the Pope recognise the interference of the State? If that should only be allowed when necessary, under what circumstances is it necessary? This is the next problem. Here, however, the subject is very cautiously handled. The pressing practical questions of capital and labour fall into two divisions, time of work, and rate of wages. The Pope glides very carefully over these dangerous points. The “three eights” of the labour programme will be some time before they can claim his patronage. When he can afford to give the working man a cheap encouragement, no words are spared. Thus there is only one point on which he gives a really clear definition; that is, the day of weekly rest. It must not be forgotten that the English Sunday is unknown abroad, and it is instructive to find that Continental Socialists are clamouring for it. Here the Pope is on sure ground. What they ask is not an innovation of modern times, but a return to antiquity. It is the first article of the old social code promulgated for all nations from Sinai’s heights, and, therefore, all will give their sympathy to the Roman Church in endeavouring to maintain this great possession of Christianity.

On hours of work the Pope is very guarded. He claims limitation of hours, indeed, for children. But he is much less categorical on behalf of women, and gives no indication at all as to men. His teachings are no more explicit as regards wages. On this point, as on many others, he contents himself with laying down general principles, and carefully refraining from entering into details of application. He maintains that the salary should be sufficient to assure the existence of the workman and his family. He claims that the wages should respond adequately to the work done. He declares that when

“a workman, constrained by necessity, accepts unduly harsh conditions, which he cannot refuse, he undergoes a violence against which justice protests.” But once he has laid down these theoretical statements he stops short. He retreats before the idea of government interference. He appeals to associations, to corporations. In fact, though we do not enter into details, the Pope accepts State control with great reserve, and certainly under greater restrictions than is the case in England. As for the Socialist—there is no hope for him. Leo XIII. ends up in everything by discouraging State intervention, and when he does admit it it is only grudgingly, as a *pis-aller*.

The fourth section of the encyclical need not be discussed here, as it does not treat of Socialism proper. In it the Pope advises co-operation as a remedy. No doubt it is, in theory; but unfortunately, so far, practical co-operation has met with but indifferent success. We may note in passing that he condemns trade unions and upholds free labour.

In conclusion it might be asked, with what feeling should English Churchmen treat the encyclical as likely to affect in any way their position in the large towns? We think, with indifference. There is no doubt but that the Pope issued it as a bid for the popular breath. We have seen that this action was almost forced upon him by various considerations. Nothing else could have been expected. But it may also be inferred that no particular results will follow. The encyclical cannot appease the Socialists. We have seen that in every point where it is not vague it is opposed to their teachings. And on the Continent Socialism and the democracy are almost beginning to coincide. Therefore, as a bid for the regaining of temporal power, which, without wishing to be uncharitable, we may safely assign as a potent factor in its composition, the encyclical will fall flat. As an academic disquisition it may prove of interest to the pious “sons of the Church.” The English clergyman, however, can draw one lesson, when he observes the failure the Pope has made in his attempt to sit upon two stools. It is the lesson well enforced by Professor Sanday:<sup>1</sup>

If, then, a clergyman is to keep at the high level of his calling; if he is to preach Christ and the mind of Christ, I think that he will hesitate much to mix himself up in such things as trade disputes and agitations.

These great economic movements will work out their own progress without any unsought-for interference on the part of the minister of religion. All that he can do is to privately influence the actors therein. In other words, he should have little to do with Socialism, but a great deal with Socialists.

W. A. PURTON.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Two Present-day Questions,” by Prof. W. Sanday.