

# MORALITY IN PUBLIC LIFE

## CHAPTER ONE THE SYMPTOMS

In addressing themselves to the urgent moral problems encountered in the field of public affairs, the Archbishops and Bishops of Australia speak with a profound appreciation of the vital issues at stake in the present hour.

The threat of atomic war overhangs the entire world. Civil war rends asunder whole nations. Bitter industrial conflicts (arising from a deep-seated class-warfare) bring to a periodic standstill the productive mechanism of great countries. The political struggle among democratic peoples whose way of life is threatened by the Communist attack from without and within, too often is reduced to its grossest forms—the battle for power among politicians, unbridled abuse of political opponents, graft and patronage on many sides, and the divorce of ordinary people from political life.

Because of the very immensity of the evils with which ordinary men and women are either threatened or overcome, the good seems to pale into nothingness. The mood of our age is one of mass suffering, frustration and despair. Young men and women, inured to the horrors which the radio and the press have made their daily fare, resign themselves to the belief that the world, its joys and its sufferings, are alike without meaning, and surrender themselves to the pleasures of the day.

To a world which seems content to sit passively and await the deluge, the message of Christ's Church is one of courage and confidence. "It is wrong", declares the Holy Father, "for Christians to shut their eyes and cross their arms, alleging that nothing can be done. To selfish and uncertain principles, Christians can oppose that fearless courage which indicates the presence of joyful optimism, and of a supernatural force fostered by faith, hope and charity. By means of this force, a mighty breath of pure air will float over the whole world, dissipating the atmosphere of panic and paganism which threatens to poison it. Blinded eyes will reopen to a clear vision of truth and justice". (1)

If, however, we are to avert what seems to be the imminent death of our world, we must first diagnose the disease, then prescribe the remedy and finally, have the courage to undergo the cure.

## CHAPTER TWO THE POWER OF ORGANIZED BODIES

The Christian knows that since the day of Adam, suffering has always been part of the inheritance of men and women that suffering came into the world as a result of Adam's sin., and that it is perpetuated through the sins of Adam's children. Yet deeper and more all-embracing causes than the crimes of this or that dictator must be sought for the immense and inhuman suffering of our own era—the destruction of the nameless millions of the Second World War, the starvation of unnumbered thousands in its aftermath, the atomic death of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

A prime cause of the mass suffering of the people of the twentieth century resides in the fact that the daily lives of vast numbers of men and women are dominated by organized bodies whose policies are dictated by men acting in defiance, or in culpable ignorance of, the moral law. Sin has thus been elevated to the level of policy in certain organizations whose acts dominate the lives of entire communities. And the wages of mass sin, is mass death.

Of all the factors distinguishing this century from the other nineteen of the Christian era, none is more significant than the overwhelming importance which organized bodies have assumed over the lives of individuals. Governments, political parties, employers' associations, trade unions, professional associations, trusts, combines, cartels, organizations of farmers and other primary producers, have come to wield an immense power, so that their decisions not only affect the lives of their own members, but are the intimate concern of every section of the community, and even of the citizens of other lands.

In past ages, a man who aspired to power would seek to control the government of his country. In the last hundred years control of the government has given to the ruler an even closer and more intimate control over the personal lives of the governed. Yet, in our time it is true that the men who speak in the name of industrial management, the men who control financial power, the trade union leaders, and the leaders of primary producers' organizations, are often more powerful than the governments themselves.

(1) *Pius XII. Address on Feast of St. Eugene, June 2nd, 1947.*

In each of these fields, a man's power for encompassing good or evil depends on his control of one or other of these organized bodies, which are the bone structure of the community. By controlling one or other of these organizations, a man can do good or wreak evil which alike will affect the lives of great numbers of people. Without this control, there is little he can do.

The control of organizations is the key to the well-being or the suffering of the masses.

It is equally true that organizations will dispense good or evil to the vast multitudes of people whose lives they affect according to the policies by which they are inspired. If governments, in their mutual relations, are inspired by policies of justice and charity, the result is international peace and concord. In this event, even the new-found knowledge concerning atomic energy would not threaten devastation to mankind. But if governments are inspired by policies based on greed or hatred, then the result is inevitably war and destruction; and men will use all their knowledge of physical laws, however horrible the consequences, to encompass the destruction of mankind.

As with governments, so with the great economic organizations, which are almost all-powerful in our era. If the policies animating organizations of employers and workers are policies of justice and charity, the result will be industrial peace and harmony, the absence of industrial turmoil and unrest. But if they are policies of greed, suspicion and hatred, the results will be conflict and class-war.

If, then, it is only the ORGANIZATION which possesses the power to bring great prosperity or great suffering to the masses, the POLICIES of the organizations are the factors which determine good or evil. POLICIES, however, are the work of brains, of minds, of conscious choice. Yet organizations, as such, have no life. They have no brains, no minds, and are incapable of conscious choice. POLICIES, therefore, are the work of MEN—of the men who control the organizations and, equally clearly, although in a different way, of the ordinary members of these bodies, who either choose the leaders or, by their apathy, allow the leaders to assume control.

Granted the great and sometimes catastrophic results which follow upon the policies of different organizations—international war following upon the evil policies of governments, civil war following upon the unbridled ambitions of political parties, class war following upon the conflict of unions and employers' associations, hunger and malnutrition following upon the extreme claims of agricultural associations—the motives of all those concerned, the canons of conduct which should guide both the leaders and the members, must be examined.

For it is upon the moral conduct of men and women, in relation to these organized bodies, that the well-being or the suffering of mankind largely depends.

### CHAPTER THREE PRINCIPLES WITHOUT COMPROMISE

In treating of the responsibilities of both leaders and members in these various organizations, four general principles of universal application must be stated from the beginning:

A. While a just objective of all such organizations is to advance the sectional interests of that part of the community which they represent, their dominant aim must always be to seek the common good, the public welfare and the interests of the community as a whole.

The men who control the government of a nation are morally responsible if they seek to further what appear to be their own interests, or those of their own people, at the cost of the peace and well-being of other nations. The men who control trade unions, employers' or professional organizations are equally answerable if, in defiance of the interests of the community as a whole, they use their power to further their own sectional ends.

There is, therefore, a direct moral responsibility on all public men, politicians, directors, union and employer representatives, in particular, to develop and support policies which guard the common good, as distinct from the sectional interests and advantage of any particular group in the community.

"It is the duty of all to understand", declares the Holy Father, "that the present social crisis is so great and so dangerous for the future as to make it necessary for all . . . to place the common good before private advantage". (2).

The greater the power of which an individual directly or indirectly disposes, the greater the degree of moral responsibility for the proper use of that power.

(2) *Pius XII. Christmas Broadcast, 1947.*

B. If any of the powerful organizations of which we have spoken pursue unjust policies, and in consequence cause positive harm to other sections of the community, the ordinary member of this organization cannot automatically disclaim moral responsibility, and seek to place the blame on his leaders.

Naturally, the degree of individual responsibility varies according to the amount of influence the individual can possibly exert. "In no case, however, can it be right simply to acquiesce passively in evil policies pursued by an association of which one is a member. The obligation of the individual conscience cannot be placed on the shoulders of a committee or even of a majority, in an organisation." (3) ,

This principle applies equally to the employer, the trade unionist, the doctor, the farmer or the lawyer. When the association of which he is a member adopts policies opposed to the moral law, or to the duties imposed by justice and charity, he cannot disclaim responsibility simply by saying he did not vote for the policy in question or for the committee which formulated it. Nor is he free from blame when he failed to vote at all, for his very failure to vote was, in itself, a contribution to the injustice committed.

In certain circumstances, this very failure to vote may constitute a grievous sin. Thus, on the occasion of the Italian elections of 1948, the Holy Father warned the Catholics of Italy that failure to vote, in view of the imminence of the Communist threat, would constitute a mortal sin of omission. (4)

C. No man may trade his conscience to any political party or to any secular organization.

The wise words of Cardinal Bourne relate to Australia as well as to England: "First, in this country, a man or woman is free to join the political party (5) which makes the greatest appeal to his sympathy and understanding. Secondly, having done so, he or she must guard against erroneous principles which, on account of the affiliations affecting these parties, are to some extent at work within them. Thirdly, he may never deliver himself, or his conscience, wholly into the keeping of any political party. When his religious faith and his conscience come into conflict with the claims of the party, he must obey his conscience and withstand the demands the party makes upon him".

D. Finally, the Christian recognizes only one morality. If lying, dishonesty and incitement to hatred are morally wrongful in private relationships, they are even more wrongful when employed in the course of public affairs.

Whether it is in politics, or in international affairs, or in industrial relationships, the Church does not recognize any "rules of the game" which attempt to justify conduct violating the moral law. A lie is a lie, dishonesty is dishonesty, hatred is hatred, irrespective of whether these methods or motives are used in private or in public life. It is apparent that, apart from their intrinsic evil and immorality, lying or dishonesty or hatred in private affairs may harm only a few individuals. In public life, when they are placed at the service, or enshrined in the policy of powerful organizations, the harm they can inflict may well induce a national calamity. Hence, moral responsibility for acts of this kind is not lessened when they are performed in the course of public life, because of some supposed separate moral code governing this sphere of activity. Precisely the opposite is the case.

The Christian is not entitled, therefore, to divide his moral standards into two separate compartments, one for private life, one for public life. If he does this, he is in serious danger of losing his soul.

In the whole of revealed truth, there is nothing which says that while lying is wrong as far as private relationships are concerned, yet in public life it is not forbidden. There is nothing which says that while dishonesty is a violation of the Seventh Commandment, yet this prohibition is qualified by the understanding that the public man is entitled to take bribes. Nor is there anything which says that while the cultivation of hatred is grievously sinful if one man hates another or induces a third to hate another in private life, yet this rule does not hold if one is, for example, an employer, and the other a union official.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught only one set of moral laws, and He meant them to apply to every aspect of life. By obeying those laws in every aspect of life, the Christian will save his soul. If, with deliberation, the Christian refuses to obey them, he will lose his soul. Nor is any half-and-half arrangement possible, which justifies the man who obeys them in the private sphere and not in the sphere of his public life.

(3) *"Paws In Industry"*, 1947.

(4) *Address to the Roman clergy*.

(5) *(Other than the Communist Party.)*

## CHAPTER FOUR TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Having thus pointed out the general principles of morality applicable to the conduct both of the leaders of organizations and of ordinary members, we address ourselves now to certain specific problems arising in various types of organizations. In dealing with these problems, we do not propose to discuss all questions which may arise under the various heads, but rather to confine ourselves to the most important problems concerning public life at the present moment.

### 1. POLITICAL LIFE

The nobility of political life, properly conceived, has rarely been better described than by the late Holy Father, Pius XI, in his discourse to the Catholic University Federation of Italy. (6)

He spoke of the field of politics, as one which, because it concerned itself with the interests of the community as a whole, was "a field for the widest charity of all, the field of political charity, of which it can be said that none other is superior, save that of religion."

Since the vocation of politics is so noble, it follows that the responsibilities of those who take part in politics are equally great. The men who govern the community need, therefore, to be ever conscious of the truth, that although they may have been chosen for office by the people, the authority by which they govern comes from God. The authority is given to them so that they may secure the well-being not only of their own nation, but, as far as they can, the good of men and women everywhere.

Hence, it is a serious crime to abuse the authority and power of government by making this power and authority the instrument for unlimited expansion of one nation at the expense of the well-being and sometimes of the very independence of other nations.

It is a grave wrong to use political power to incite hatred of other peoples and races, or to pursue policies based on a false concept of racial superiority.

In political life the Christian cannot justify the incitement of hatred in any form—whether it is against another individual, another race or another nation. This principle binds the Christian, whether the impulse to hatred arises naturally as it were out of the depth of his own feelings, or whether it is rather the result of cold calculation to incite hatred for some political advantage.

It goes without saying that the acceptance of bribes by public officials cannot be justified under any circumstances. It is a sin against the Seventh Commandment, and must be repented as such.

In the matter of politics, however, it would be a mistake to believe that all the moral responsibility rests on the shoulders only of those who play an active part in public life. "it is obvious that no Christian can declare that he is not his brother's keeper. We are members one of another. We are all brethren in Christ. It is unchristian, therefore, to imitate Pilate in washing our hands of public acts for which, as members of the community, we have a share of responsibility. If our rulers, acting in our name, do what is offensive to conscience, we must ask ourselves, 'Who put these men in power?' . . . In a democratic community all who have the right to vote bear some responsibility for the actions of those in high office." (7)

The ordinary citizen may not take refuge in the foolish boast that, because of the corruption of some politicians, he refuses to take any interest in politics. The Christian is obliged to use his vote. As the Holy Father himself pointed out in the relatively recent past, to fail to use the vote, when sufficiently grave issues are at stake, may "constitute a mortal sin of omission".

This duty to use his political rights binds the Christian not only in elections to determine the Government of the nation, but in local elections, and, in others in which he is eligible to vote, such as for his trade union, his employers' or his professional association.

Nor does the duty of the Christian begin and end on election day. The good citizen will always watch what is being done in his name, and by using all legitimate means within his power, will ensure that no legislation or other regulations will be passed which are contrary to the principles either of natural law or of religion.

(6) *18th December, 1927.*

(7) *Cardinal Griffin. Pastoral Letter to Archdiocese of Westminster, Lent, 1948.*

## 2. EMPLOYERS' ORGANIZATIONS

While the moral obligations of politicians and of trade unionists are frequently emphasized, it should never be forgotten that the responsibilities of employers in relation to their own organizations are equally onerous, and that they are often evaded, sometimes with disastrous results.

The phrase used by an advocate representing the employers in the course of the Arbitration Court hearing of the Forty-hour Week case—"We concede nothing"—represents the same unmoral approach to social problems for which spokesmen for the employers are themselves accustomed to condemn the trade unions.

Leaders of employers' organizations are as strictly obliged by the moral law as are the leaders of trade unions to subordinate their own sectional interests to those of the community as a whole. It is wrong that the workers should frequently be compelled to light long and costly industrial battles for what are widely recognized as just claims. In adopting a "last-ditch" stand on many of these claims, employers' organizations are abetting injustice, and both leaders and ordinary members must bear the moral responsibility.

Ordinary trade unionists are frequently criticized for their apathy in refusing to attend union meetings, thus allowing minority groups with which they have no sympathy to speak for them on vital issues. It seems that this criticism may be voiced with even greater truth where employers as a body are concerned. Too often, the "last-ditch" attitude maintained by some leaders of these organizations does not represent the attitude of the average employer, who is anxious that his workers should obtain a fair deal from industry. Yet, this fair-minded type of employer who, through his apathy, allows unprincipled groups to speak in his name, cannot evade responsibility for the stand taken by his associations.

Apart altogether from the moral implications, the material consequences of a policy of "no concessions"—even to just claims—are so far-reaching, that it is difficult to discover the reason for it. Spokesmen for employers' organizations complain of class war tactics pursued by certain elements in the unions.

Yet their own policy of resisting every claim, no matter how valid it may be, is the very seed-bed of class war, the necessary condition of its growth. Communists, who would otherwise find it difficult to develop their political strikes, are given the industrial pretexts without which they could not initiate any strike.

These are cogent reasons of a material character which underline the folly of many of the policies of employers' organizations. Yet, apart from material considerations, the moral responsibility of leaders and of ordinary members of these organizations is very great, since, by abetting injustice, they are setting themselves against the justice and charity of Christ.

## 3. TRADE UNIONS

The obligations of the trade unionist in relation to his union have been emphasized with such frequency in recent years as to leave no one in any doubt as to his moral duties. Particularly when a trade union is under assault from Communism, which seeks to capture it in order to use it as a weapon in the cause of its illicit revolutionary programme, the Christian unionist is obliged in conscience to exert himself to prevent the triumph of Communism.

It would be a mistake, however, to believe that the only obligation of the trade unionist is a negative one—to prevent the capture of his trade union by the Communist Party. Issues far wider than Communism are involved.

The basic Christian virtues of justice and charity are the concern of the trade union no less than of political parties, of governments, employers' organizations and of other organized bodies which have obtained such vast power in this century.

This responsibility to base union policy on justice and charity has become all the more pressing in recent years, during which economic life has become so complex that a strike in one small section of an industry can often bring about general industrial paralysis and cause untold sufferings to large numbers of innocent people.

It must be borne in mind by those Christian unionists who are influential in making the policies of their unions that, while Christian social doctrine acknowledges the legitimacy of certain strikes, the use of the strike weapon is wholly subject to the moral law, and must be guided by its principles.

The phrase, "This is an industrial issue", is sometimes used by trade unionists in the same way, and with the same implication, as business men will say, "Business is business". When analysed, both phrases imply that economic matters are outside the moral law. In the final analysis, the phrase, "This is an industrial issue", implies that when an

industrial struggle begins, the one objective is victory at any price, and that the end justifies the means.

We repeat that there is no such thing as a division of a Christian's conscience into two compartments—one, a conscience which governs his private relationships, the other, a conscience which governs his public relationships and the industrial policies on which he acts. The Christian has but one conscience, and the principles which govern public and private life are the same.

Thus, the conditions for a just strike, which follow from the teachings of Christ, can be ignored by the Christian only at his peril. It is useless to say that industrial war is like international war, for even in international war the Christian is bound by certain moral laws beyond any lesser loyalty.

In industrial relationships, the Christian unionist and the Christian employer, have a twofold duty:

(i) When industrial action is called for, they must decide as a matter of conscience which is the right and the Christian policy to pursue.

(ii) In the case of industrial action, they have a duty to work out with others a Christian policy in relation to the particular dispute.

Above all, by constant attention to the business of their respective organizations they will seek, in co-operation with others, to develop those conditions in which any form of strike action will be unnecessary.

These injunctions are simply based on the twin principles that members of an organization must be held responsible for the acts and policies of that body, and that no man may trade his conscience to any organization.

#### 4. FARMERS' ASSOCIATIONS

In a different way, but in one which may breed consequences as serious in the long term as the policies already noted, the associations of primary producers are also in danger of placing sectional interests before the interests of the community as a whole.

In recent years, the movement in the prices of primary products has turned in favour of the farmer. In certain respects, this is a healthy phenomenon, for no factor was more powerful in producing the disastrous flight from the land in the last thirty years, than the depressed price for farm products. The swing in the pendulum of agricultural returns has enabled many farmers to rid themselves of their debts, and to establish themselves on a sound financial footing.

The first consequence of this change, is that the city populations of Australia and of those countries to which Australia's primary products are exported, have been called upon to pay prices for food which seem high in comparison with those paid before the war. Insofar as this rise in prices is a result of the payment to the farmer of a just price for his products, there are no valid grounds for complaint, since these higher prices are necessary to enable the farmer to meet higher costs, to pay a family living wage to his employees and to obtain a fair return for himself and his family.

Beyond this natural development, however, we have witnessed evidence of a disposition among certain farmers' organizations to use their bargaining position in a world still desperately short of food, to obtain higher than a just price for the products of their members. Such a policy spells hunger for the war-stricken peoples of Europe and Asia. While there may be grounds for legitimate dispute as to what is, in fact, a just price, there can be no justification for an attitude concerning itself only with obtaining the highest possible return, and refusing to admit that prices must be governed by the moral law. There is no reason why the farming community should accept less than a just price for its products. Equally, however, it would be an evil thing for the farming community, through its organizations, to regard the hunger of millions of Europeans and Asiatics as an opportunity for its members to enrich themselves.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The power of organized bodies in the modern world is so immense that there is no man or woman whose personal life is not intimately affected by the policies they formulate. The policies of governments determine whether there shall be international peace or war—at the end of this choice lies the atom bomb. Herein lies the evil of the aggressive policies of the Soviet Union which, by increasing its armaments to the maximum, compels other nations to do the same in their own defence. The policies of industrial organizations determine whether there shall be social peace or class war—at the end of this choice lies social revolution. The policies of primary producers' organizations determine

whether or not the peoples of the world shall be able to buy the food they need—at the end of this choice lies hunger and starvation for entire nations.

The atom bomb, social revolution, mass starvation, can be averted only if the policies of organized bodies are Christian policies, creating the conditions which will avert these dread results.

Organizations, in themselves, are inanimate. Dead things do not make policies. Policies are made by men, the men who lead the organizations, the men who elect them or who passively allow them to lead.

With such immense consequences following upon their policies and their actions, it is intolerable that members should permit their organizations to base their policies on lying, on dishonesty, on fraud, on greed, or on the lust for power.

Above all, it is intolerable that those Christians who, in either capacity, compose these organizations, should follow two moral codes—one, in their personal life, which does not permit lying or dishonesty or fraud or greed, and another, in their public life, which regards all of these things as lawful instruments of policy.

For the Christian, sin is sin whether it is committed in the course of private or public life. And although the gravity of the sin committed in the formulation of many public policies will vary with the degree of knowledge, with the position of responsibility and with the motives of the person concerned, and also with the effects of his wrongdoing, no sin is ever palliated by the consideration that it is committed not for private gain, but for public policy.

In conclusion, we repeat the words uttered by the Holy Father in his Christmas Message of December 24, 1944.

"The question of the high moral standard, practical ability and intellectual capacity of their parliamentary representatives is, for every people living under a democratic regime, a question of life or death, of prosperity or decadence, of soundness or perpetual unrest.

"To secure effective action, to win esteem and trust, every legislative body—as experience shows beyond doubt—should have within it a group of select men who are spiritually eminent and of strong character. These men will look on themselves as the representatives of the entire people and not as the mandatories of a mob, whose interests are often unfortunately preferred to what is really required for the general welfare. This group should not be confined to any one professional or social class, but should reflect every phase of the people's life. They should be chosen because of their solidly Christian convictions, their straight and steady judgment, and their grasp of what is practical as well as equitable. True to themselves in all circumstances, they should have clear and sound principles, healthy and definite policies. Above all, they should have that authority which springs from unblemished consciences and inspires confidence, an authority which will make them capable of leadership and guidance, particularly in crises which unduly excite the people and make it likely that they will be led astray and lose their way". (8)

(8) *Christmas Message, December, 1944.*

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