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\* Knights of Malta \*

June  
2015

## Chancellor's Update

### The Reality of Social Justice

In 1891 Pope Leo XIII wrote, “Among the many and grave duties of rulers who would do their best for their people, the first and chief is to act with strict justice – with that justice which is called in the schools *distributive* – towards each and every class.”

“All citizens can and ought to contribute to the common good. Yet it is not to be supposed that all can contribute in the same way and to the same extent. The labor of the poor is most efficacious and altogether indispensable. Justice, therefore, demands that the interests of the poorer population be carefully watched over by the administration, so that they who contribute so largely to the advantage of the community may themselves share in the benefits they create.” (*Rerum Novarum*, section on Justice Towards All)

Forty years later in 1931 Pope Pius XI reviewed and assessed this situation. “Wealth, which is constantly being augmented by social and economic progress, must be so distributed amongst the various individuals and classes of society that the common good of all, of which Leo XIII spoke, be thereby promoted. The good of the whole community must be safeguarded. In quoting St. Paul, “If any man will not work, neither let him eat.” (2 Thes. iii. 10), the Apostle is passing judgment on those who refuse to work though they could and ought to do so; he admonishes us to use diligently our time and our powers of body and mind, and not to become burdensome to others as long as we are able to provide for ourselves. ...All the institutions of public and social life must be imbued with the spirit of justice, and this justice must above all be truly operative.” (Quadragesimo Anno, sections on Principle of Just Distribution, The Restoration of the True guiding Principle of Economics)

Ninety years after *Rerum Novarum* in 1981 Pope John Paul II resumed the discussion on St. Paul in his encyclical “On Human Work”. ““With toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you.” (2 Thes. 3:8) Hence his instructions, in the form of *exhortation and command*, on the subject of work: “Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living,” he writes to the Thessalonians. (2 Thes. 3:12) In fact, noting that some “are living in idleness...not doing any work,” (2 Thes. 3:11) the Apostle does not hesitate to say in the same context: “If any one will not work, let him not eat.”” (2 Thes. 3:10) The Pope concluded this section by writing, “The norm of human activity should allow people as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfill it.” (*Laborem Exercens*, section on Christ, the Man of Work)

In his book Right and Reason Austin Fagothey described the modern term, *social justice*, as the organization of society, to which all are expected to contribute in proportion to their ability and opportunity, and is available to all members for their ready use and enjoyment. Excluding certain classes or groups within a society from their fair share of the common good is considered a violation of social justice.

Fagothey continued that man’s right to life and limbs, to food and air, to marry and raise a family, comes from the one who has given these things to man; this is not the state, but God. (Austin Fagothey, Right and Reason, Saint Louis, C.V.Mosby Co, 1963, p 203, p 213)

In the current century the governments, leaders of culture, and the churches have urged society to have compassion and show kindness for those less fortunate, for victims of oppression, for the marginalized, for those living in poverty, and for the most vulnerable members of society. After years of various government programs and increased taxation of the citizens, many have asked what has actually been accomplished in regard to solving or alleviating these problems.

At a speech given at Hillsdale College, William Voegeli addressed this question by asking, “whether there is a point at which the welfare state has all the money, programs, personnel, and political support it needs?” He concluded, “There is no answer – the welfare state is a permanent work-in-progress, and...it always needs a great deal more.” “The Progressives of a century ago worked to transform a republic where there were no grievances the government could or should refrain from addressing.” To succeed in reducing suffering in the world, “liberal activists and publicists have successfully weaponized compassion” and politicized kindness. Giving speeches, writing letters and articles, fundraising, and saluting some government program prove that the liberal activists care and are doing something. When opponents of the welfare state object to its continuing expansion or the squandering of government funds or the inefficiency of some programs, Voegeli pointed out that welfare state supporters call these opponents “cruel, greedy, callous and indifferent”. The liberal empathizers view themselves as benevolent, compassionate and good. The professionals operating these programs “acquire a vested interest in the study, management, and perpetuation--as opposed to the solution and resulting disappearance--of sufferers’ problems”, so that “the helpers and the helped are endlessly, increasingly co-dependent”. (“Reprinted by permission from **Imprimis**, a publication of Hillsdale College.” October, 2014 Vol. 43, No. 10)

Another speaker at Hillsdale College also studied the problem by relating his experiences with the underclass that was being served by government programs. Anthony Daniels, a doctor and psychiatrist in the United Kingdom, described the household “with a shifting cast of members. The adult male was a bird of passage.” Children often did not have a biological father at home, but often that role was taken by the television or the government. Women no longer question whether a man would be a suitable father for a child. Instead of a family meal, eating was often reduced to “foraging in the refrigerator with the food consumed sitting in front of the television”. The illegitimate birth rate was high. Excuses and lying were common as well as blaming misfortunes on external forces. This worldview of the underclass was accepted and officially encouraged. Heroin addicts were viewed by themselves and others as helpless victims, who could not help themselves but needed the assistance of a bureaucracy. Some politicians promoted salvation by redistributing from one segment of the population via taxation to the bureaucracy and the underclass, who were neither grateful nor accepting the payments as sufficient. Many considered their monthly benefit check as being paid: “existence being their work”. (“Reprinted by permission from **Imprimis**, a publication of Hillsdale College.” May/June, 2014 Vol. 43, No 5/6)

If three previous popes acknowledged the poor as people who worked and who deserved respect for that work, how did this current generation begin to accept idleness as equal to work? Where are the vocation and its fulfillment described by Pope John Paul II? Were people subjected to a form of brainwashing or Sensitivity Training or consensus building or behavior modification that abandoned self to submerge into the group? Or was it the power of persuasion or conforming to political correctness that would result in “ideological colonization” recently described by Pope Francis?

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