

Christian Corporatism

The difference between Corporatism and Fascist schemes.

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CORPORATISM IS A VALID TERM that is under a modern stigma. Too often the social philosophy of Corporatism has been associated with the ideology of the Fascist Corporative State, or the sad experiment of Vichy.

In a recent article entitled "Liberalism and Christianity," MODERN AGE, Fall 1957, Dr. Wilhelm Roepke made a brief reference to the subject of Corporatism as if it were synonymous with the Corporative State. While Dr. Roepke's article has many merits and is friendly to Catholic social thought, I feel that a further discussion and possible clarification of Corporatism is necessary.

In discussing the value of Pius XI's encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, Dr. Roepke concludes that Pius XI did not advocate Corporatism, since the encyclical explicitly states the unfavorable elements of the Corporative State. Dr. Roepke also argues that one can find neither the Latin term nor the concept of Corporatism in the encyclical's proposal of reform.

While I agree with Dr. Roepke's general observations on the Corporative State, still one must not equate Corporatism with the Corporative State. There is an important distinction that must be kept in mind, one made by an outstanding social philosopher, Father Von Nell-Breuning, S.J., a man of the intellectual climate of Pius XI. Nell-Breuning distinguishes the Corporative Society from the Corporative State.¹ Such a

distinction not only can clear up terminological misunderstandings, but clarifies further the nature of Corporatism as expressed in the Corporative Society. Once this distinction is appreciated, the obvious conclusion is that what the author of the encyclical is proposing is neither undemocratic nor incompatible with free enterprise and individual initiative. Rather, the principles of Pius XI offer a positive solution for many of the socio-economic problems menacing modern society.

In making the proper distinction, a study in brief detail must first be made of some of the principal features of the Fascist Corporative State. From 1930 to 1931, Mussolini began to outline the nature and function of the Corporative State, although it was not until 1934 that it was established by law. Under Mussolini, the syndicalist system evolved into the Corporative State. The intricate system of syndicates, federations, and confederations was linked together by twenty-two corporations embracing the key industries and professions. These twenty-two corporations were composed not only of the representatives of the respective syndicates of both employers and employees, but also of the officials of the Fascist Party. Over and above the corporations was the National Council of Corporations, of which Mussolini was president. In practice, the entire corporative and syndicalist system was infiltrated by the Fascists and was under the direct control of the State.

The general purpose of the corporations was to control production for national in-

terests. In practice, this meant proposing and fixing the prices of goods and wage standards, settling those labor disputes which had not been settled by the lower tribunals of the syndicates, and finally advising the government on all questions of economic interest.

Although Pius XI was aware of the immediate economic advantages of the syndicates and corporations, he objected to a situation in which there was complete domination of the economic life of the country by the State: "We feel bound to add that to our knowledge there are some who fear that the State is substituting itself in the place of private initiative, instead of limiting itself to necessary help and assistance. It is feared that the new syndical and corporative institution possesses an excessively bureaucratic and political character, . . . and that it risks serving particular political aims rather than contributing to the initiation of a better social order." (95).

Mussolini's idea was to make the Corporative State the end of all productive and social life; the State was to operate like a huge business corporation rather than a function of Society. Each individual was important in the corporative scheme insofar as he had an economic and social value, not to Society, but to the State. According to J. Messner, "The ideological basis of Fascist corporatism consists in the principle of the 'immanence of the state in the individual' and the 'identification of society with the state'."²

The fact that the Corporative State of the Fascists was primarily a political institution is what immediately separates it from the Corporative Society. Pius XI stresses the point that the Fascist corporations were not autonomous bodies, but were ". . . organs and institutions of the State . . ." The principle of subsidiarity which is essential to the notion of a Corporative Society was not to be found in the internal character of such corporations. For example, in the National Council of Corporations, the actual members of the

twenty-two corporations were only the representatives of the various branches of industry or the professions. The representatives who had precedence and control were the three members of the Fascist Party chosen by the secretary of the party, and then the representatives of employers and employees.

Thus in substituting itself for private initiative, the Corporative State violated the essential principles of subsidiarity and autonomy, attempting to secure of itself the entire economic and social welfare of the people. Instead of being a function of society, the Corporative State in fact became society in the social, economic, and political orders. This idea was once expressed by Mussolini as a kind of motto: "Everything in the State, nothing against the State, nothing outside the State."

The concept of the Corporative Society, as expressed in *Quadragesimo Anno*, is entirely different from the mechanistic plan of the Corporative State. The Corporative Society is based on the notion that society has an organic structure flowing from its nature and intrinsic unity. In social philosophy, this concept is known as the organological principle. Generally, when we hear the term "corporative," we think in reference to our modern machine-like corporations. But the term "corporative" as used in connection with social ethics refers to the organic nature of society. The word "corporative" comes from the Latin "corpus" which means body. When one speaks of society being corporative, one is comparing society to a living body. The human body is composed of a variety of organs, each performing a certain function in harmony and co-ordination with the other organs of the body. In a human body there is a true organic unity between the organs and members, although there is also a diversity of function. This corporative concept can be applied analogously to the social body. Just as there is a physical unity in the human organism, analogously there is a moral unity in the social organism. Corporatism helps to ex-

plain the inner principle of life and activity which the social body must have in directing its parts for the good of the whole.

Social Mechanism is opposed to any organic principle of unity. According to the mechanistic theories, society has only a figurative meaning; it is a collection of individuals organized in some artificial way. In opposition to mechanism, Pius XII said in his Christmas message for 1944, "The State is not a distinct entity which mechanically gathers together a shapeless mass of individuals and confines them within a specified territory. It is and should be in practice the organic and organizing unity of real people." A mechanistic society is a class society lacking this inner unity, since the only unity that mechanism has comes extrinsically from the State.

In the Corporative Society, the State is a civil society whose purpose is to promote the common temporal welfare of its citizens. But the State is not the only society. Besides all the necessary societies, men may belong to many different voluntary or quasi-public societies. Furthermore, in the Corporative Society, the State must always be guided by the two correlative principles of the Common Good and Subsidiarity, so that the rights and ends of the lesser or equal societies are able to be properly attained and secured. The principle of subsidiarity, which Pius XI expresses so clearly in *Quadragesimo Anno*, is that the State should not do those things in the temporal order which lesser societies can do for themselves:

Just as it is wrong to withdraw from the individual and commit to the community at large what private enterprise and industry can accomplish, so, too, it is an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order, for a larger and higher organization to arrogate to itself functions which can be performed efficiently by smaller and lower bodies. This is a fundamental principle of social

philosophy Of its very nature the true aim of all social activity should be to help individual members of the social body, but never to destroy or absorb them. (79)

The State in a Corporative Society, then, must achieve the proper balance between the principle of the common good and the principle of subsidiarity. When Doctor Roepke referred to the Corporative State and said it was undemocratic, he was correct. But this cannot be said of the Corporative Society, because the principle of subsidiarity preserves the freedom of lower social groups in the social, economic, and political orders.

In the Corporative Society, men would not be grouped solely according to mutually exclusive classes, but rather re-grouped according to their natural socio-economic function in society. As the encyclical explains, ". . . there cannot be question of any perfect cure, except this opposition be done away with, and well ordered members of the social body come into being anew, vocational groups namely, binding men together not according to the position they occupy in the labor market, but according to the diverse functions which they exercise in society" (83).

The corporative concept of society is not something new in social philosophy. One of the most characteristic elements of the guild system was the functional organic principle. The guilds were public social groups of men who were united in the same profession or trade. Management and labor were united to perform a certain function in society so that there existed an occupational bond between the master, journeyman, and apprentice of each guild. While Pius XI does not advocate any return to the guild system, he does stress the important social principles involved, the functional or organological principle which is needed for our modern society: ". . . because on account of the evil of Individualism, as We called it, things have come to such a pass that the highly developed

social life which once flourished in a variety of prosperous institutions organically linked with each other, has been damaged and all but ruined, leaving thus virtually only individuals and the State. Social life lost entirely its organic form." (78).

Pius XI carefully avoids presenting any pre-conceived plan for achieving the Corporative Society. He specifically states that the principles for any concrete plan of reform must be "adapted to different places and circumstances." In other words, it is up to the economists and sociologists of individual countries to present for consideration an adaptable plan informed by the principles of a true Corporative Society.

Pius XI does propose for consideration the establishment of a new socio-economic institution for society which he called an "order," as Dr. Roepke says. Such an institution would provide not only for the individual good of the members, but primarily for the common good of society. The Pope explains that those who are engaged in the same trade or profession will form a new association characterized by the common effort of employers and employees. ". . . true and genuine social order demands various members of society, joined together by a common bond. Such a bond of union is provided on the one hand by the common effort of employers and employees of one and the same group joining forces to produce goods or give services; on the other hand, by the common good which all groups should unite to promote, each in its own sphere, with friendly harmony." (84). This means that over and above the private associations of management and labor, there still remains the need of some kind of public association in which representatives of management and labor can collaborate not only for their own interests but primarily for the interests of the common good of society.

Dr. Roepke implies in his article that nowhere in *Quadragesimo Anno* can one either find the term or the concept of Corporatism. And the terminology of *Quad-*

ragesimo Anno does present a difficulty in this regard. When Pius XI comes to giving a name to the new socio-economic institution, he does not use the term "corporation," but coins a new word, "ordines." Various equivalents have been proposed as translations for the word; from time to time the term "vocational groups," "occupational groups," "corporative groups," or the literal word "order" have been used. Here in America we use the term "Industry Council."

When one reads the section of the encyclical entitled *Reconstruction of the Social Order*, the reason for the Pope's Latin terminology of "ordines" becomes more apparent. He is concerned with a re-ordering of society. In defining the nature of the social order, Pius XI makes use of the definition attributed to Thomas Aquinas on order, "unity in well-arranged multiplicity." The word "order" has a special significance in the encyclical. It is also probable that Pius XI coined a new word so that no one could claim an identification with a political system. But in reference to a socio-economic system of reform, Pius XI does explicitly use the term "corporative" in some of his other writings.³ The most notable use of the term is in *Atheistic Communism*, where Pius XI refers to what he had proposed in *Quadragesimo Anno*, and uses the word "corporative" in the sense of a system to explain the concept of a Christian Corporatism.⁴

In order to understand why the Fascist Corporative States lacked the principles of autonomy and subsidiarity which are essential in the Corporative Society, we should briefly consider the sociological theory of Universalism as proposed by Othmar Spann. Universalism stands diametrically opposed to the philosophy of the Corporative Society. As a motivating theory behind the Fascist ideology, Universalism begins with the individual as a relative part of society. Although Spann began with the individual, rights did not come from the individual, but from the "totality" which was Spann's concept of society. Spann af-

firms that "it is the fundamental truth of all social science . . . that not the individuals are the truly real, but the whole, and that the individuals have reality and existence only so far as they are members of the whole."⁵ For Spann, society was coterminous with the State, and from the State flowed the rights of the individual, the family, the syndicates, even religion. According to Spann, the individual exists for the sake of society, not society for the sake of the individual. It logically followed that the entire social, economic, and political life of society emanated from the State. Thus in its identification of Society with the State, and the immanence of the State in the individual, Universalism helped to form the ideological basis for the Corporative State.⁶

In contradistinction to the theory of Universalism, Christian Corporatism explains that in the Corporative Society, the individual is conceived as a social being by nature, who has an eternal destiny. Society is not just a collection of individuals; it is a moral union of men which has the common good as its goal. Because of his God-given natural rights, the individual creates the moral entity of society. Therefore, according to Christian Corporatism, the individual does not exist for the sake of society; but society exists for the sake of the individual.

In the Corporative Society, the economic function of the State is derived from the principle of the common good. The State has the maximum economic welfare of society as one of its ends. The authority which the State has in the economic order must be considered in both its negative and positive aspects. Negatively, the State has the right and duty to intervene when any economic situation threatens the common good. But as Leo XIII says, "The State must not undertake more nor go further than is required for the remedy of the evil or the removal of danger." In the Corporative Society, the State would not only have to be guided by the principle

of the common good, but also by the correlative principle of subsidiarity. Positively, by its social legislation and in other ways, the State would provide the necessary conditions so that the subsidiary groups would achieve their proper ends by an organic reform instead of a state reform. Fr. John Cronin says, with respect to positive legislation, ". . . the State would be restored to its true and rightful position as the supreme guardian of the common good, aiding and stimulating lesser groups rather than absorbing them, and contributing to a maximum of individual freedom and national well-being."⁷

These then are, in summary fashion, some of the principal elements of a Corporative Society and what distinguishes it from the Corporative State.

⁵Here I refer to Oswald Von Nell-Breuning's commentary on "Quadragesimo Anno," *Reorganization of Social Economy* (New York: Bruce Publishing Co., 1936), especially pages 210-241. Mention should also be made of the works of Charles Bruehl, *The Pope's Plan for Social Reconstruction*, and Joaquin Azpiazu, *The Corporative State*.

⁶J. Messner, *Social Ethics* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1949). Of special interest is his treatment of Fascism and also the distinction between Modern Corporatism and the Fascist concept. Mention should also be made of Raymond J. Miller's excellent book *Forty Years After; Pius XI and the Social Order*.

⁷The Latin text of *Quadragesimo Anno* designates the subsidiary groups as "ordines" (81), and also as "collegia" or "corpora" (86). The Code of Social Principles uses the term "corporative organization" in n. 64, 65.

⁸In *Atheistic Communism*, the Latin text reads ". . . quae corporatorum hominum collegia dicebantur. . ." (93). In this context Pius XI is making reference to what he proposed in *Quadragesimo Anno*. Translators thus use "corporative system." For the Latin text, see *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 29:65-106. The basic English translation for *Quadragesimo Anno* and *Atheistic Communism* can be found in either Nell-Breuning's commentary, or the Paulist Press Pamphlet *Five Great Encyclicals*.

⁹Quoted in J. Messner, p. 562. Besides Messner, Azpiazu has a good treatment of Othmar Spann and the theory of Universalism.

¹⁰John F. Cronin, S.S., *Catholic Social Principles* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1950), p. 537.

¹¹*Ibid.*