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sentiment needs no adventitious aids, for it is safe here to trust the unbiased instincts of mankind. So far as prophecy can reach, it seems certain that man will always worship, and that the symbols of the Christian tradition will afford the ultimate vehicle of his devotion. There is the less need therefore to use compulsion upon the minority, in whom the instinct of worship is weak. It is the same with religion as with music. To some persons music makes no appeal. Yet no one proposes to exclude such individuals from teaching, nor indeed from teaching the rudimentary parts of musical theory. On the other hand it is not the business of the teacher to trespass on the functions of the pulpit. The school-room is not the place for religious propaganda. In fact the professed atheist is not a more dangerous enemy to religious feeling than the mawkish advocate. It thus appears that the argument for religious tests in the teaching profession breaks down even when it is regarded, not from the standpoint of abstract freedom, but from the standpoint of religious feeling itself.

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WERE THE CHURCH FATHERS COMMUNISTS?

THE assertion is frequently made that several of the most distinguished of the Fathers of the Church were communists, in the sense that they believed private property to be wrong. This contention seems to have originated with Barbeyrac, a prominent ethical writer of the early Eighteenth century.¹ At present it is most commonly voiced by the socialists although it is also to be found in writers like Nitti,² and de Laveleye.³ The Fathers most commonly cited in this connection are Clement, Chrysostom, Augustine, Basil, Ambrose, and Jerome. The first three of these need not detain us; for the passage in which

¹See his "Traite de la morale des Pères," p. 144.

²"Catholic Socialism," pp. 64-70.

³"Le Socialisme Contemporain," p. ix.

St. Clement is made to declare for common ownership is now recognized as spurious; the declarations of St. Chrysostom are merely fervid denunciations of the rich men of his time, while St. Augustine, in the passage that is usually quoted, is speaking of the *legal* title, not the moral right of ownership. With regard to Basil, Ambrose and Jerome, it must be admitted that some of their utterances are, on the surface, capable of an interpretation that seems to be out of harmony with the doctrine of private property. Let us see whether this interpretation is legitimate. We begin with St. Basil.

In order to estimate fairly the denunciations of wealth which are found in the pages of this writer, we must bear in mind that they were spoken in sermons addressed to rich men of his time, and that he was himself an ascetic, a monk, the founder, in fact, of monasticism in Asia Minor. He lived on the poorest fare, wore haircloth, and in general, to use his own words, "treated his body as an angry owner treats a runaway slave." To him the proper use of wealth was more important than a precise definition of its rights; hence in his sermons we find little concerning rights, but much concerning obligations. He seems to regard the possession of great wealth as a curse, and the possessors thereof as utterly heartless. A fair sample of his opinion of the rich of his time is seen in the following words addressed to usurers: "You make a profit out of misfortune; you levy a tax upon tears; you strangle the naked; you heap blows upon the starving." This, it is obvious, is not the language of a scientific treatise, but of a fervent condemnation of a social wrong. And it is in this light that all of St. Basil's strictures on wealth must be judged.

The passage which follows is the severest arraignment of private ownership, or rather, of the private owners whom he knew, that is to be found in all of St. Basil's writings. From it the socialist writers have drawn the saying of which they have made so much, namely, "the rich man is a thief." Other statements of his views will be found in his Homilies: "To the Rich;" "On Psalm XIV;" "On Avarice."

"'Upon whom,' he (the private proprietor) says, 'do I inflict any injury in retaining and conserving that which is mine?' What things, tell me, are

yours? Whence did you bring them into the world? You rich act like a man who, being the first to enter a theatre, would keep all others out, regarding as his own that which was intended for the common use of all. For you appropriate to yourselves the common heritage, simply because you were the first occupants. Whereas, if every man took only what was sufficient for his needs, leaving the rest to those in want, there would be no rich and no poor. Naked you came from the womb; naked you shall return to earth. Whence your present possessions? If you say, 'from fate,' you are impious, since you do not recognize the Creator nor render thanks to the Giver; if you answer, 'from God,' then tell me why you have received them. Is God so unjust as to distribute the necessities of life inequitably? Why are you rich and your neighbor poor? Is it not to enable you to receive the reward of benevolence and upright stewardship, while he obtains the crown merited by patience? Yet you fancy that you do no injustice when you gather all things into the fathomless recesses of your greed. Who is the avaricious man? The man who is not satisfied with enough. Are not you, then, avaricious? Are you not a despoiler? For you have made your own that which you have received to distribute. Is he not called a thief who strips a man of his clothes? And he who will not clothe the naked when he can,—is he deserving of a different appellation? The bread that you keep in your possession belongs to the hungry; the cloak in your closet, to the naked; the shoes that you allow to rot, to the barefooted, and your hoarded silver, to the indigent. Hence you have done injustice to as many as you have failed to help.¹⁰⁴

A careful and unprejudiced reading of this passage will show that it does not bear out the claims of those who use it to prove that Basil denied the right of private ownership. Not the right itself, but an exaggerated interpretation of it, is condemned. The rich man is represented as claiming the right to do what he pleases with his goods. St. Basil tells him that he has no such right, that what he calls his own was given to him by God, and that God wishes him to distribute so much of it as he does not himself require to the needy. First occupancy of property does not confer the right to exclude everyone else. Consequently the rich proprietor wrongs as many as he could have helped but did not.

Only through a radical misconception of the nature and limitations of private ownership could this teaching be called communistic. To be sure, if the right of private property is made to include the right to use one's property as one pleases—the

¹⁰⁴"Hom. in Luc." xii, 18, "Destruam," No. 7, Migne, "Patrologia Graeca," vol. 31, col. 276.

"*jus utendi et abutendi*" of Roman Law, which is substantially the interpretation put upon it by most of the legal codes of to-day,—then St. Basil must be regarded as an opponent of private ownership. But this is not and has never been the Christian conception. According to Christian teaching, man's right to property is an endowment of his personality; it springs from his innate right to subsist on the bounty of the earth. This right is common to all, and equal in all. And it is the *primary* and original right of ownership. The right of any individual to acquire, use, and dispose of a particular portion of the earth or its resources, is *secondary*, and subordinate to this common and primary right. Consequently, all private rights of property must be defined and exercised in such a way as not to prevent any person from enjoying his innate right to live upon the bounty of nature. Nitti asserts that it was only after the Church became wealthy that ecclesiastical writers began to repudiate the teaching of the Fathers on property, and to defend private ownership. Among the prominent advocates of the new doctrine he mentions St. Thomas of Aquin. Well, the fact is that this writer's doctrine, while expressed in colder and more scientific language, is precisely the same as Basil's. Private ownership is right, he says, if the goods be justly acquired and justly used.⁵ The first condition, then, is that the private owner must get possession of his property without violating the rights of others. He may not deprive his fellows of goods that they have justly acquired, nor appropriate so much of the unclaimed heritage of nature as to make it unreasonably difficult for other men to exercise their innate rights of use and ownership. Therefore, when Henry George, who, by the way, makes use of the theatre illustration employed by St. Basil, denounces private property in land for the reason that it would enable a few men to monopolize the entire habitable globe, he has in mind a false and unchristian conception of private rights. In the second place, even when a man has gotten possession of his property lawfully he may not use it according to his own sweet will. He sins grievously, says Aquinas, if he does not

⁵"*Contra Gentes*," lib. iii, cap. 127.

distribute some of it to the indigent. Furthermore, the same writer maintains that a man who is in extreme need may, if no other means of relief be available, seize some of his neighbor's goods, and that this will not be theft or robbery, because the man's needs entitle him to call what he takes his own.⁶ Here we have the doctrine that human needs constitute a right of ownership which is superior to any private right. It is the correlative equivalent of St. Basil's assertion that the superfluous bread, and clothing, and shoes in the rich man's possession belonged of right to his hungry and naked neighbors. Allowing for differences of language, circumstances, and temperament, the limitations to the right of private property laid down by St. Thomas are fully as "communitic" as anything to be found in the writings of St. Basil. And I may add that his teaching on the subject is to this day the accepted Catholic doctrine.

The claim that St. Basil was not a communist does not, however, rest on this merely negative basis. Positive proofs of his belief in private ownership are not wanting whether in his words or in his conduct. "Do not," he says to the rich man, "give up your soul to wealth, loving and admiring it as the one good thing in life, but take the opportunity to use it as an instrument of service."⁷ Instead of asserting that the possession of wealth is in itself unlawful, he maintains that it is good, since it may be made to serve good ends. This, indeed, is the central thought in all his utterances on wealth—that it should be rightly *used*.

In another place he declares that money is called the "mammon of iniquity" because, "some of the predecessors of the present holders may have obtained it unlawfully," thus assuming that it is possible to acquire property lawfully. Otherwise he would not need to go back to former proprietors to find a reason for calling the private ownership in question "iniquitous."

Again, he frequently advises men to sell their goods and give the proceeds to the poor, which he could not conscien-

⁶"Summa," 2a 2ae, q. 66, a. 7.

⁷"In Psal. lxi," No. 198, Migne.

tiously do if he believed all private property to be wrong. This would be to command men to sell what they did not own, and thus to attempt to convey to others a title that they did not themselves possess. If he did not admit the justice of private ownership he should have said nothing about buying and selling, but should have bade the owners to distribute their goods to the poor directly.

As to St. Basil's conduct, we find that, while he renounced his property in a general way in his early youth, he never separated himself from it completely. A certain portion of it he leased to a foster brother on condition that he should himself be supported out of its revenues. He also retained some interest in its management, as we learn from two letters written to a certain tax official.⁸ In one of these he asks that the estate be rated at its former assessment, and in the other he explains the conditions on which his foster brother took charge of the property. "At the same time, this was not to be regarded as an absolute gift; he was merely to have the use of the property during his lifetime, with the proviso that if any serious inconvenience befel him in managing it, he was at liberty to give it back into my charge. In that case I should be responsible in the matter of rates and collectors." St. Basil, therefore, acted to a certain extent as landlord, received profit from his estates, and stood ready to reassume active direction of them. Now his character and life completely refute the assumption that he could have acted thus had he believed private ownership to be unjust.

To resume in one sentence the results of our inquiry: the passages cited to show that St. Basil denied the right of private ownership merely prove that he set limits to it, and insisted very strongly on the corresponding obligations; while other passages, and especially his conduct in connection with his own estates, furnish positive evidence that he saw in the institution nothing inherently wrong.

The views of St. Ambrose are substantially the same as those of St. Basil. He declares over and over again that riches are

⁸"*Epistolae*," 36 and 37.

a hindrance rather than a help to salvation, that the pursuit of them is the highest folly, that they are unnecessary and altogether to be despised. To those who will not make a proper use of their goods he promises the severest punishment. I quote three of the strongest denunciations of wealth that I have been able to find in his writings.

"You are not giving to the poor man anything that is yours, but are rather restoring something that is his. For you have appropriated to yourself goods that were intended for the common use of all. The earth is for all, not merely for the rich; yet the number of those who possess merely their own is smaller than the number of those who enjoy more than their proper share. You are but paying a debt, not giving alms."⁹

"The Lord, our God, desired the earth to be the common possession of all men, that its fruits might sustain all, but avarice has made a distribution of the titles (*jura*) of possession. Hence if you claim private ownership of any of that which was given to the whole human race—nay, to all living things—in common, it is but just that you should give something therefrom to the poor, and not deny sustenance to those with whom you ought to be a fellow sharer."¹⁰

Here we have, not communism, which would order the rich to turn their goods over to the community, but the Christian principle that the earth was intended by the Creator for the benefit of all His children, and consequently that when some men are prevented from enjoying their share through the greed of others, the latter are guilty of injustice and are bound to make reparation. Hence St. Ambrose tells the wealthy usurpers of his time that what they are urged to give to the poor is not an alms, but the payment of a debt. They have accumulated so much as to deprive other men of their birthright. And anyone who will read the history of the oppression of the poor in Italy in the Fourth century will concede that Ambrose spoke the simple truth when he accused the wealthy proprietors of robbery. What he condemned was not private property in itself, but the unjust extension of it, and the disregard of the duties attaching to proprietorship. This is evident especially in his statement that if the private owner wishes to claim exclusive control over any of the common bounty of earth he ought in justice to give a portion of it to the needy. "*Justum est, igitur,*

⁹"De Nabuthe Jezraelita," cap. xii, No. 53, Migne.

¹⁰"In Psal. 118," No. 1064, Migne.

ut si aliquid tibi privatum vindicas, saltem aliquid inde pauperibus aspergas."

"Hence they (the Romans) regarded it as the office of justice that men should hold what is common, that is, what is public, as public property; and what is private as their own. This is not, indeed, according to nature; for nature has poured forth her bounty as the common gift of all. Thus, God decreed that goods should be created in such a way that there would be a common sustenance for all. Nature, therefore, is the mother of common right appropriation (*usurpatio*) of private right."¹¹

The expressions in these passages which have been interpreted favorably to the communistic view are: "This (division of goods) is not according to nature" ("*secundam naturam*"); and, "appropriation has produced private right" ("*usurpatio jus fecit privatum*"). Taken by itself, the first of these statements may, indeed, be understood as asserting that a division of the bounty of the earth—any division—is *against* nature, and consequently in conflict with the Natural Law. On the other hand, it may without any violence to language, be taken to mean that the actually existing division has not been the work of nature. In this interpretation, nature would be regarded as permitting, or even as authorizing, the institution of private property, while leaving the creation and form of it to social action. In other words, nature sanctions but does not perform the work of allotting portions of the common heritage to particular individuals. St. Thomas puts the distinction clearly: "Common property is natural, not in the sense that the Natural Law directs all things to be possessed in common and nothing privately, but in the sense that human convention rather than Natural Law brings about a division of property."¹² A strong presumption that this is the meaning of the sentence in question arises from the fact that the passage from which it is taken is little more than a paraphrase of a paragraph in Cicero's "*de Officiis*." In this place the Roman orator declares that by nature all things are common, but that private ownership has come into existence through various kinds of human action.¹³

¹¹"De Officiis," lib. i, No. 35, Migne.

¹²"Summa," 2a, 2ae, q. 66, a. 2.

¹³L. I., Cap. VII.

The second sentence noted above—"usurpatio jus fecit privatum"—is the one usually cited to show that St. Ambrose denied the right of private property. This interpretation turns on the meaning of "usurpatio." In the footnote to page 297 of "*Die Frau*," Bebel translates it into "*ungerechte Anmassung*," yet he encloses it in parentheses, thus showing that he is not certain that his rendition is correct. "Usurpatio" did, indeed, take on the meaning of "usurpation" in post-classical times, but in the classical era it signified simply "use," "acquisition," "appropriation." In the context that we are considering, "appropriation" would seem to be the proper rendering for the following reasons: First, St. Ambrose, being a brilliant classical scholar, would probably use the word in its primitive and classical sense; secondly, "appropriation" expresses the thought of Cicero upon which St. Ambrose is commenting, and with which he seems to agree; and thirdly, to translate "usurpatio" by "usurpation" would be to make St. Ambrose contradict his own conduct and his own positive statements in favor of the right of private ownership. The following are some of the statements referred to:

"Wealth is not prejudicial to faith if we but know how to use it."¹⁶

"As in the wicked riches are a hindrance, so in the good they are an aid to virtue."¹⁷

"Not those that have riches but those that do not know how to use them, are condemned."¹⁸

"Riches are not in themselves blamable. . . . And even in riches there is opportunity for virtue."¹⁹

Ambrose declares that the direction given by Christ to the rich young man to sell his goods and give the price to the poor was not a precept, but a counsel which the young man was free to accept or reject.¹⁸

Thus St. Ambrose asserts in unequivocal language that pri-

¹⁶"In Psal. 40," No. 880, Migne.

¹⁷"In Luc. ix," No. 1493, Migne.

¹⁸"In Luc. ix," No. 1371, Migne.

¹⁹"Epis." Clas. I, No. 1064, Migne.

²⁰"De Viduis," cap. xii.

vate property is licit if only it be properly used. Moreover, his treatment of his own goods clearly supposes the same views. Like St. Basil he gave up his property at the beginning of his ecclesiastical career, but with certain restrictions. His gold and silver he handed over to the Church, but he committed his estates, with the exception of a life interest for his sister, to the management of his brother, Satyrus. Thus he saw fit to safeguard the property rights of his brother and sister, and to retain for himself the legal title to the greater part of his landed possessions.

Of St. Ambrose, therefore, as of St. Basil, it may be said that when he is most severe on wealth he attacks not the institution of private property but the abuse of it, and that his conduct and explicit statements show that he believed it to be in itself just.

Now as to St. Jerome. "Opulence is always the result of theft, committed, if not by the actual possessor, then by his predecessors." This saying is attributed to St. Jerome by Nitti in his "Catholic Socialism" (p. 69). While no reference accompanies the quotation, we are safe in concluding that it is a free rendering of a maxim which seems to have been frequently heard in St. Jerome's time, and which occurs in the three following passages of his works.

In the "Commentary on Jeremiah" he explains the Prophet's condemnation of the "wicked men who have become great and rich through deceit," in these words:

"And they fill their houses through the plunder and losses of others, so that the saying of the philosophers may be fulfilled, 'every rich man is unjust or the heir of an unjust one.' " ("Omnis dives aut iniquis aut iniqui haeres."*)

Thus he makes the words of Jeremiah confirm the "opinion of the philosophers."

In the "Commentary on Habacuc" he declares that, "those who work for honors or riches in this world become the tabernacles of demons, which is strikingly shown by the single word iniquity (*iniquitatis*); for 'every rich man is either unjust or the heir of an unjust one.' " ²⁰

*Book I, chap. V, verse 26.

*Book II, chap iii, verse 7.

The proverb occurs again in the "Epistle to Hedibia." A widow in Gaul had written to Jerome to know how she was to follow the way of perfection, and how to interpret certain passages of the Scriptures. In answer to her first question he refers to the parable of the Unjust Steward, and draws therefrom this inference:

"And you, therefore, since you have few children, make to yourself many friends of the mammon of iniquity who may receive you into everlasting dwellings. 'Of iniquity' was beautifully said; for all riches come from iniquity, and unless one were to lose, another could not gain. Hence the common adage seems to me to be very true: 'The rich man is unjust or the heir of an unjust one.'"²¹

Continuing on the same topic, he says that for a rich man to enter heaven is not so much a difficulty as an impossibility. In fact, the whole context is most severe upon riches and the rich.

It will be observed that the saying in question is given in one passage as "the opinion of the philosophers," in another, without any reference to its origin, and finally, as a "common expression." The important consideration is that Jerome makes it his own, quoting it with distinct approval. He, therefore, subscribes to the opinion that every *rich* man (not every man of property, for "*dives*" always means a man having much property) was an unjust man. Elsewhere he denounces riches in equally strong language. In the "Commentary on Micheas," we find the following: "Now, however, the rich abound not so much in wealth as in injustice; for all riches being a spoliation of others are born of injustice."²² In the "Commentary on Isaiah," we are told that, "one man does not accumulate money except through the loss and injury suffered by another."²³ Again we are exhorted to beware, "lest in accepting gifts of the earth from men who have gathered them through plunder and the tears of the wretched, we become, not so much thieves ourselves, as the companions of thieves."²⁴

These declarations show that St. Jerome believed in a gen-

²¹"Epistle" 120.

²²Book II, chap. vi, verse 3.

²³Book II, chap 33, verse 13.

²⁴Ibid, book I, chap. 1, verse 23.

eral way that the great fortunes of his time were dishonestly acquired. Now this is a question of fact, not of abstract right. The legitimate inquiry, therefore is, Did St. Jerome correctly interpret the facts of his time? Speaking generally, it would seem that he did. When he wrote the yeomanry of Italy, the men who cultivated their own land, had long since disappeared through impoverishment or violence. To them had succeeded the holders of the "*Latifundia*," and the hordes of dependent tillers. Already in Pliny's time, these immense estates were, in the words of the writer, causing the ruin of Italy, while half the Province of Africa was in the hands of six owners. The evils of this institution had undoubtedly become so great by St. Jerome's time as to constitute an outrage on the Christian sense of justice. Moreover, he did but repeat a maxim which the opinion of philosophers and the common belief of his time had made a "*vulgata sententia*." Nor is his language by any means unique. Of the *present* titles to landed property the following words were written by Herbert Spencer: "It can never be pretended that the existing titles to such property are legitimate. . . . Violence, fraud, the prerogative of force, the claims of superior cunning—these are the sources to which these titles may be traced." These extracts are from the first edition of his "Social Statics." "I say," writes W. S. Lilly in "Right and Wrong," "that to much modern property the saying of Proudhon is strictly applicable." If these two men can write thus of present-day fortunes, is it any wonder that St. Jerome, ascetic as he was and fervid of temperament, used harsh language concerning the spoiliations practiced in his time?

At any rate, Jerome nowhere declares that private property is always or necessarily wrong. Indeed, the very wording of the phrase which he quotes approvingly,—"*every rich man is either unjust or the heir of an unjust one*"—shows a belief that some of the wealthy proprietors referred to were guilty of no personal injustice. They were merely the inheritors of wrong dealing. Now if all private property were in Jerome's view contrary to the moral law it would not have been necessary for him to go back to the misdeeds of former owners in order to

justify his condemnation of existing titles. The fact is that it was the manner of acquiring these great fortunes, and not the simple ownership of them that he found blameworthy. Again, it must be remembered that he speaks only of *rich* owners, not of all proprietors. Finally, he frequently gives explicit and general assent to the doctrine that private ownership is lawful in due conditions. Thus in the "Commentary on Ecclesiastes," he declares that it is better to be wise and rich than to be merely wise, because of the possibilities of doing good which are afforded by riches.²⁵ In his "Epistle to Salvinia," he says that wealth is not a hindrance to the rich man if it be wisely used, and calls attention to the fact that Abraham was a friend of God in the midst of riches. In the same "Epistle to Hedibia" in which he denounced the rich, he wrote as follows: "Ananias and Saphira deserved the condemnation of the Apostle because they secretly kept back their property. 'Must he therefore be punished,' you will say, 'who will not give away his own'? By no means. They were punished because they were willing to lie to the Holy Ghost and sought vain glory by pretending they had renounced all things, while retaining the requisites of sustenance. In general (*alioquin*) one is free to give or not give." These extracts and others that might be adduced, show that St. Jerome believed in the right to hold and regard some property as one's own. Like St. Basil and St. Ambrose, he condemned the abuses, not the institution.

In conclusion it must be admitted that many of the Fathers seem to have looked upon the ideal of a Christian community of ownership with a fondness and wistful hope that have not been shared by any considerable number of the great Christian teachers that have lived since their time. They were not far removed, either in time or viewpoint, from those early believers of Jerusalem who had "but one heart and one soul," and they probably regarded that example of Christian communism as not altogether impossible of imitation. They were perhaps not so thoroughly convinced as we of to-day that such an ideal is realizable only by the select few. Hence isolated expressions

²⁵ Chap. vii, verse 12.

of theirs have been used in favor of the contention that they rejected the doctrine of private ownership. But when these passages are considered as the utterances of fervid preachers and teachers whose immediate purpose was to correct the flagrant injustices of their time, they easily become capable of a different explanation. And when they are interpreted in the light of the clear and explicit declarations of their authors in favor of the principle of individual property rights, the explanation that has been offered in this paper is seen to be the only reasonable one, namely, that the Fathers condemned not the institution but the abuse and exaggerations of private ownership.

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BYRON AND MORALS.

THE relation of Byron to morals is not a simple inquiry in personal biography, nor a question merely of judgment or justice towards an individual man, but involves some very vital points both of ethics and the philosophy of fine art. In discussing, therefore, the morals of Byron and his poetry, it is not necessary to follow in the tracks of the Caroline Lambs, the Beecher-Stowes, and the proper public generally in onslaught, nor of the Moores, the Austins, or even the Castelars at defence, but is possible to raise the subject onto more universal grounds, and to look to its more universal interest. Frankly, it is the intention, in the following pages, to combat the conventional verdict which says, "it is to be deplored that scarcely any moral good is derivable from the splendid poetry of Byron," and even Scott's amiable epitome of "that mighty genius, which walked amongst us as something superior to mortality, and whose powers were beheld with wonder, and something approaching to terror, as if we knew not whether they were of good or evil." But it is not intended to proceed by the method of palliation. I have no purpose—though something of this is being done these very days more effectively than ever,—