

LETTER

TO

MR LÉON HARMEL

BY

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Léon Harmel, le Bon Père du Val-des-Bois

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Paris, 20 September 1894.

My dear Mr Harmel,

I have watched you live.

In the intimacy of the hospitality, so Christian and so French, that you twice offered me at Val-des-Bois, in the bosom of your household and of your great industrial family, I grasped the secret of your life and felt the breath that animates the whole of it.

I was also able to witness the outward flowering of this life, and to feel still more keenly the breath that animates it, at the many social congresses where I had the joy of meeting you, in contact with so many lofty minds, so many generous souls who brought there both all the knowledge they had acquired and all their desire to acquire still more; thus giving me, for my own part, so many new occasions to bless God in his providential designs for France and to learn something in my turn.

I am now about to leave France to return to Italy, to find Rome again, the natural attraction of the little and the weak; because there is the centre of the Church, that ever-burning hearth of light and love, that impregnable fortress of right and justice.

A traveller in search of solutions to the social question, which grips America just as much as Europe, I do not wish to depart from France, the mother country of Canada, my country, without telling you publicly the impression I carry away from my dealings with you, from your motives and from your actions, in the face of the great social problem, which in reality is none other than the problem of the future.

I have seen the strong who approve of you and admire you.

I have seen the weak who love you and bless you.

I have seen the humble who listen to you and follow you.

It is among these last that my place is clearly marked out; it is by mingling in their ranks that I come to tell you my thoughts.

You are a craftsman, a great craftsman of life, and you are this craftsman because you are an intrepid apostle of justice and peace.

Taken in its strictest exactness, justice consists entirely, for beings, in the possession of the means to their ends. And as for peace, it consists, for its part, entirely in the rest that beings find in the accomplishment of their ends.

That is why there is no justice without peace and no peace without justice. After the example of the Master of us all, Our Lord Jesus Christ, every great champion of justice is a great peacemaker, and every great peacemaker is a great champion of justice.

Justice without peace is the elimination of the right to rest in the accomplishment of one's ends; that is to say, the wholesale oppression of all rights. Peace without justice is liberalism, that insidious error which has seduced, and still seduces, so many generous minds, but which comes down to this lamentable illusion: that one has more ease, more freedom to attain one's ends by sacrificing, as quantities more or less negligible and in any case in no way imperative, the necessary and inescapable means of fulfilling those very ends. Hence the wholesale oppression of all duties.

You are a champion of justice. Yes indeed! You love to render justice to whom justice is due; and, in the economic order, without losing sight of the justice owed to those who possess *justly*, you take care that it is not refused to those who toil and labour, without neglecting either those who suffer poverty from causes beyond their control.

In this noble ministry you are guided and strengthened by beliefs that defy all contradiction, because they rest on the principles of eternal truth. In the light of these principles, you understand the organisation of labour and the providential economy of its rights and its duties.

The organisation of labour was made by God. Let men not undo it, and all will go well.

I am not speaking of the first organisation of labour by God, the one that Genesis indicates to us in these words: “*The Lord God took man and placed him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it.*” This free and gentle labour, easy and pleasant, *delightful*, in a word, as the very soil on which it was exercised was named, lasted no longer than the state of innocence and happiness of which it was the strength and the glory.

I am speaking of the organisation of *expiatory* labour, which is contained entirely in this other word of the Bible: “*Only with great toil will you draw your food from the earth each day. You will eat your bread by the sweat of your brow.*”

Thus man shall work; his labour shall be painful; but his toilsome sweat will bring him *bread*, and by bread we must understand the things necessary for the support of his temporal life as well as for the ways of his eternal life. To work in order to have bread, to sweat in working in order to expiate: such, then, in the mind of the good and merciful God, was the second and definitive organisation of labour within humanity.

From this flows this fundamental prescription of the whole economic order: to prevent labour either from providing material bread, that is to say the things necessary for temporal life, or from obtaining pardon, that is to say the grace of spiritual life, is the disorganisation of labour as God definitively instituted it.

The most elementary notions of philosophy enlightened by theology come to corroborate this doctrine.

“*Divine goodness,*” says St Thomas, “*being diffusive of itself, willed that all things should resemble it, not only in their manner of being, but also in their manner of operating.*” Without inquiring how man resembles God *in his manner of being*, let us note that he resembles him *in his manner of operating*, in that he is a *cause* able to

give *being in act* to what has it only *in potency*. In the likeness of God, though in a finite measure, man is therefore a cause too.

We call a *cause* anything from which the being of another thing follows. *Matter* and *form* are the two constituents of every *composite* being. The composite is either *natural* or *artificial*. The natural composite is the work of nature; the artificial composite is the work of art.

Every cause has rights over the effect it produces, for two elements constitute causes: 1. *distinction*, because the thing that passes into being cannot be the same thing as the principle that gave it being; 2. *dependence*, because to be brought by something from non-being to being is to depend on that same thing with respect to being. This dependence has as its rule and its measure the accomplishment of the *end* that the *efficient cause* sets itself in giving being to what does not have it. That is why this end is called *the final cause*.

Every cause has duties towards the effect it produces; for it owes this effect the means of fulfilling its end. And in this way, if the effect has duties to fulfil towards its cause, it also has rights over its cause, for it has a right to the means of its end.

The exact notion of justice is nothing but the reflection of these principles.

I add in passing a few useful remarks:

1. The rights of man over God are only relative. They are rights relative to the divine wisdom, which was free not to give being to man, but which, having given it to him, and having given him at the same time obligatory ends to fulfil, was bound to put him in a position to fulfil those ends. Through sin, man freely turned away from his ends and lost all his rights. That is why the Redemption, which leads man back on to the path of his ends, is properly the reign of grace;

2. Right and duty are inseparable and correlative: the one presupposes the other. There is no right without duty and no duty without right;

3. Right and duty, all rights and all duties, emerge and arise from relations, from the relationships of cause to effect and of effect to cause, and solely from these relations, these relationships;

4. Finally, as God is the cause of causes, he is the first cause of all rights and the ultimate reason of all duties.

These points being clearly settled, the office of justice is to render to each the good that is due to him. The good is the equation of the thing with its end. Justice therefore consists in guaranteeing to effects the means of fulfilling their end.

Now, since man can be a cause only in a secondary measure, since he *makes* but does not *create*, he cannot give the effects of which he is the cause any ends other than those in harmony with the end that God set himself in creating all things. Otherwise he would fail in justice towards God by bringing about the inequation of beings with the ends that the Creator has assigned to them.

Thus justice is the virtue that *protects duty and right*: duty, by letting every being fulfil its end; right, by depriving no being of the means of fulfilling its end.

To see clearly now as regards the organisation of labour in industry, we need only refer to the application of these principles.

This kind of labour must first of all fulfil the two ends that God has assigned to man's labour, namely: 1. to provide bread for the worker; 2. to help him expiate. And, since what must be expiated is the sin that brings death to the soul, expiation exists only in so far as man thereby recovers the life of the soul. To dechristianise the world of labour, that is to say to rob the worker of his hopes of the future life, of his faith in the expiatory virtue of his labour, is the most odious outrage that can be committed against divinity and against humanity.

In sum, labour can fulfil its end only by giving the worker, along with everything necessary for temporal life, everything indispensable for eternal life.

Consequently, no one has the right to make others work, and no one has the duty to work, outside these two conditions; and strict justice requires that scrupulous account be taken of them in the organisation of labour.

Moreover, in industry, the product is the *artificial composite*. The employer supplies one of the constituents of this composite: the *raw material*, or *being in potency*; the worker supplies the second of these constituents: the *artificial form*, or *being in act*. But *form is the first act of a physical body*. It is therefore through form, and through form alone, that raw material, or being in potency, becomes being in act. The worker is therefore truly the *efficient cause* of the artificial composite he produces. A cause like the employer, the worker, like the employer, acts with a view to an end and consequently has rights over his effect: the *artificial composite*. What does the worker intend in fashioning the material? To procure the things to which he has a right and which strict justice requires be given him, namely: *what is necessary for his temporal life, for his spiritual life, for the temporal and spiritual life of his family*, that is to say, to specify the chief of these things: *sufficient food, healthy housing, decent clothing*; for his children, an upbringing and an education *that do not make them fall from the social position to which they have a right*; then, *definite resources* against unemployment, the accidents of his trade, sickness and old age; further still, *effective access to property*, as the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* has stipulated this right in favour of the working class in this vigorous formula: “As the effect follows the cause, so it is just that the fruit of labour should belong to the labourer”; and finally, along with all this, assistance, care, religious advancement and everything relating to it.

As regards the necessary spiritual assistance to which the worker has a right in justice, and which must be taken into account *in the remuneration of his labour*, we must understand by this the assistance that costs money and relates to the material organisation of worship,

to the building of churches, to the upkeep of the clergy, of schools and of all pious works. Such is the situation of the Catholic Church in every country, not excepting, to one degree or another, several concordat countries.

To conclude, this is what constitutes the final cause of the worker's labour; this is what the artificial composite he produces *must* bring him.

To stop short of this is anarchy; to go beyond it is charity; to remain within these limits is justice, strict and severe justice.

The expiation willed by God consists in resignation to labour, to its toil, to its pains of various kinds, with a view to the sovereign good, and not in *destitution*, that is to say in the lack of the things necessary for life, *for want of work*.

Why not say it boldly? Charity begins only when justice is satisfied, and wherever justice is not satisfied, anarchy takes hold of the world of labour. If I owe my neighbour ten sous, it is only when the eleventh sou passes from my pocket into his that I can claim to be charitable towards him.

Is it not through disregard of these principles that anarchy has become triumphant, and that almost everywhere today, although sometimes laying scandalous claim to charity, it presides over the relations between employer and worker, between capital and labour? The anarchy of capital has begotten the anarchy of labour, and the social order struggles between these two anarchies, which are waging a fight to the death against each other.

As for the rights of the employer, they are incontestable, and no sensible person denies them. But, since there is no right against right, the employer's rights cannot extend to swelling his profits at the expense of the worker's rights.

And since he has the duty not to destroy the organisation of labour as it is willed and instituted by God, his *superfluous* profits are

legitimate only on condition that they do not deprive the worker of what is legitimately due to him.

And let no one say that, since the industrial product is an object of commerce, which gives it a new character, a new being, grafted no doubt onto the first but nevertheless distinct, this product, by reason of this commercial character, has as its efficient cause the employer and not the worker.

The industrial product has a commercial *value*, just as the agricultural product also has a value that is likewise commercial, and sometimes an industrial value as well. This does not prevent the fact that, just as the farmer is neither an industrialist nor a merchant, so the industrialist is not a merchant either.

The value of the industrial product is no more *determined* by the employer than by the worker; it is determined, in the end, by the fortunes of trade. The proof is that, whatever value the employer and the worker may fix for their product, this value will always depend on the ups and downs of trade, whether national or international. Every day we see industrialists ruined precisely because trade cannot give their products a sufficient value.

Moreover, the worker works, just as the employer does, with a view to this commercial value of the industrial product. Let us ask an employer why he put his capital at the service of one industry rather than another; he will say that it is because of the prosperous future of that industry, that is to say its commercial value. Let us ask the worker the same question about his choice of the industry in whose service he spends his strength; he will give the same answer. No doubt worker and employer each consult their tastes and aptitudes in taking up the apprenticeship or the enterprise of a given industry, but both also consult the prospects of that industry, or its commercial value.

If, then, the commercial value of the industrial product is independent of the will and the action of the employer and the worker, al-

though both have it in view in choosing and pursuing their industry, it cannot be invoked to give the former a superiority of right over the latter.

If the worker, as certain economists would have it, is an instrument in the hands of the employer, the employer too is an instrument in the hands of the worker. The one says: I need what is *necessary*, I must have the *industrialist-employer*; the other says: I need the *superfluous*, I must have the *industrialist-worker*. Thus both seek each other, call upon each other and serve each other so closely in the exchange of service that they are now designated only by one and the same word: the *Industrialist*.

I add that, studied in the light of this doctrine of causes and effects, all the other services of the social economy appear, with little difference, endowed with the same rights and subject to the same duties.

Certainly all authority comes from God: *omnis potestas a Deo*, and the Revolution, which denies this fundamental truth, cannot be the foundation of any human organisation that is just, upright or simply honest. It deserves no support in anything, no credence, no compromise, no hope of “making something decent of it”; being satanic by this very denial. But there is authority and authority, master and master, servant and servant, because there is the religious order, the family order, the civil order, the military order, the judicial order, the municipal order, the order of domestic service, the landed order, the industrial order, the commercial order, the intellectual order, the international order, etc., etc. The essential thing is to distinguish clearly, in every order and in every service, where the rights of command and the duties of obedience begin and where they end, in order to avoid two things equally baneful, perverse and condemned by God: *Oppression* and *Revolt*.

No one is a master in order to exploit, on a more or less vast scale and for his own profit alone, the talents, the strength, the labour, the

life of his inferiors. It is not to make use of their brothers, but above all to serve them, that God has established masters.

Well then, my dear Mr Harmel, you are a champion of justice, because you proclaim these fundamental principles of justice and because you devote the apostolate of your life to making them known, accepted and applied in the whole social order.

But you are, moreover, a peacemaker.

Not that you understand peace apart from toil and combat; that false peace branded by the Holy Spirit: “*Et dixerunt pax et non erat pax*”; that peace made of a wisdom condemned to perish: “*Perdam sapientiam sapientium*”, of a prudence doomed to reprobation: “*et prudentiam, prudentium reprobabo*”; a peace made, again, of capitulations before the enemy, as if life, whether physical, intellectual and moral, or political, social and religious, were not a continual combat against obstacles and enemies within and without.

Persuaded, on the one hand, that men are better than their errors, and, on the other, that they are often the sons of the errors of their surroundings, you fight false principles, but you spare those who are imbued with them.

From this height you remain beyond the reach of personal attacks. You thus keep all your freedom and all your energy for the triumph of right and justice.

A peacemaker in the just and right sense, you bring it about that everything around you rests in the accomplishment of its ends.

Understanding well that the end of your weavers is not merely to weave wool, but much rather to procure their daily bread, what is necessary for the support of the present life, you assign them wages proportioned to their temporal needs. Convinced that man does not live by bread alone and that he has the right to possess the means of procuring all that lies beyond this *not by bread alone*, you *weigh* and *measure* the wage according to the *number* of the needs that make up this beyond.

Mathematical foresight, in the end. Is it not St Augustine who affirms that *mathematics is found everywhere, even in the soul*? Naturally, since *God made all things by number, weight and measure*.

Let us not be surprised, then, if we find mathematics in the great questions of social justice and peace, and if those who wish, as you do, to give such problems their Christian solution set themselves to weigh and measure the wage according to the number of the worker's many needs.

A fine and great speculation, this, of peace and justice embracing each other, "*justitia et pax osculatæ sunt*", whose touching reality I saw at Val-des-Bois, in your workshops, in your workers' families, in your circles, in your workers' unions, in your savings banks and pension funds, in your schools, in your chaplaincy, in your chapel; in a word, in your whole industrial organisation, ordered according to Christian principles.

Champion of justice and peacemaker, you are a craftsman of life. In social economy you do not see *the science of the production of wealth*, but rather *the science of the production and diffusion of life*.

For you, the most happily rich nation is not the one that possesses the most wealth concentrated in a few hands; it is quite simply the one where poverty is least felt among the masses of the people and where a modest comfort is the lot of the greatest number. Great fortunes are never anything but the share of the few, which explains the calculated sterility that invades families in countries devoured by the thirst for wealth. Indeed, to divide a fortune between, say, seven heirs is to reduce the wealth of each of them in the proportion of one to seven.

Great fortunes, wealthy houses: it may no doubt be useful for a nation to count some among its members; only they are truly of service in the economic order if they are the result of private and public comfort.

Let the great law of the just and equitable wage, and the abolition of the countless abuses and aberrations of capital, spread comfort through the economic world tomorrow, and we shall witness prodigious developments of national and social prosperity. The reason is elementary; it *stares you in the face*, as they say in my dear Canada. Indeed, to spread comfort is to make the means of consumption easier, or in other words to multiply the people able to consume. To multiply consumers is to multiply production accordingly and to make its sale easier; in other words, it is to ensure agricultural, industrial and commercial prosperity, in a word, economic prosperity.

But the life of man and of society is not confined to this economic prosperity; it rises higher still, since it embraces moral and religious ends, which are the supreme goal towards which every man and every society must tend, on pain of first declining and then perishing.

This is what you have magnificently understood, my dear Mr Harmel, and that is why, as a craftsman of life, I repeat, you pursue at the same time both the material organisation and the Christian organisation of the social order.

I close this overlong letter by blessing divine Providence for having given to our times, so troubled and so tormented by so many burning questions, and in particular by the labour question, a Pope who is the Pope of the workers and a French Catholic who is the Pope's worker. I give thanks to God for disposing hearts, as he does, to receive and apply the social teachings of this illustrious Pontiff, and also for raising up, as I have been able to observe, many employers eager to join in the social apostolate of this worker of the Pope. Finally, I overflow with joy and hope at seeing imposing masses of workers preparing, in the calm of order but at the same time with initiative and energy in action, to bring their indispensable help to the solution of the difficulties of the economic and social world.

Please accept, dear Mr Harmel, all my most respectful and most affectionate regards in Our Lord.

Alph. Villeneuve,
Priest.

