

L É O N H A R M E L

Reports to the Bordeaux Congress and to the Lille Congress, 1876

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THIS EDITION

This is an English translation of the original French text, made for the website leonharmel.com in 2026. It follows the original sentence by sentence, without cuts or additions.

The original collection brings together the two reports by Léon Harmel on the Christian corporation published in the proceedings of the Bordeaux Congress of the Union of Catholic Works for Workers (1876): the report on the application of the method of Val-des-Bois and the report read at the Congress of the Catholic Committees of Lille, translated here in full from their first publication. It has been typeset in the spirit of the original: title pages and headings follow the layout of the original publication.

The numbered notes are those of the original work; here they are numbered continuously from beginning to end.

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

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TWENTY-SEVENTH QUESTION

REPORT ON THE APPLICATION OF THE METHOD OF VAL-DES-BOIS

My Lords,
Gentlemen,

I should feel some embarrassment in taking the floor among you, if I had to address Athenians in search of novelties, quickly wearied of a word that they take on its human side. For indeed I have nothing new to say.

But you suffer with me at the abandonment in which so many poor workers remain; you too would like to see effective remedies applied. Your souls burn with the fire of charity. You love the workers because you love God, and your hearts are broken to see those countless crowds that throng the road to hell.

That is why you want me to speak to you once more of the Christian corporation, of this simple and logical work, so in keeping with the nature of man that we arrived at it of necessity without realising it, so in keeping with the teaching of the Church that we find its spirit, and so to speak even its form, in the work of the Apostles and in the glorious history of the past.

Why has this question not advanced further in practice? Why can we not present to you today several complete workers' corporations?

No doubt the instrument has been poor, unfaithful. — But God has taken care to help my littleness. Following the Lyon congress, the Sacred Heart gave Val-des-Bois a resounding renown. — Against our wishes, and visibly by the express will of Providence, the last congress was held at Reims, and you were able to touch the work of God for yourselves. You were able to lay your hand on the heart of this little people raised again to the faith, and several who were incredulous went home convinced. No doubt, as St Vincent de Paul says, *the*

works of God are done by degrees. One must not claim to do all things at once, nor think that all is lost because care is needed to succeed (Spiritual Maxims of St Vincent de Paul, 15 June).

But the corporation is so evident a need that it no longer meets any serious opponent. On the contrary, it has everywhere met devoted Christians who desire its establishment.

We think that a necessary instrument was lacking: A clear and detailed explanation of the corporation, an example remaining in everyone's hands, and able to answer the requests of every kind addressed to us by many industrialists eager to regenerate their mills.

It is with this design that we have written the *Manuel de la Corporation chrétienne*. We bring you its first proofs; we ask for criticism, as a great service rendered to our cause. In assemblies such as ours, where each one has a sincere desire for the truth, discussions give birth to light, and contradictions are the crucible in which the expression of thought is refined. We invite you to make all your observations to us, and to point out the unclear or defective passages; we thank you warmly for them in advance.

My Lord¹, this book belongs to you, and the Christian workers' corporation is your daughter, like all the great Catholic works of our country. The good Lord, out of merciful kindness towards his brothers the workers, did not will that you should be the bishop of a diocese, but he closed your eyes only to enlarge your heart. No longer able to be the bishop of a diocese, you became the Apostle of France. All the works were born of your inspiration, or else they found in your fatherly support the protecting strength that is needed to grow. To name only a few: St Francis de Sales, Our Lady of Salvation, the Union of Catholic Works for Workers, the Catholic workers' circles are your children.

1. His Lordship Mgr de Ségur.

The Christian corporation, though your youngest daughter, will not be the least grateful. She will always remember it; immediately after the Lyon congress, you laid her at the feet of the Vicar of Jesus Christ; and, while she was receiving the baptism of fire, you had the august prisoner of the Vatican give her the baptism of love, the fruitful blessing that is the sure pledge of life.

If the Christian workers' corporation has the firm hope of growing, of becoming strong in the world, and of giving back to Jesus Christ the whole workers' family, it is because she is the Benjamin of the Apostle of France, and the blessed daughter of the well-beloved Pius IX.

The true epigraph, gentlemen, that would suit our Manuel would be your own motto: *Sint Unum*.

The Christian workers' corporation is the only work to which this word of the Master applies entirely; it is the only one that unites within it priests and laymen, the upper class and the lower class, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, in the union of faith, in the union of social doctrines and in the union of common efforts for the Christian regeneration of society. — It is the only one that unites all the works in a divine harmony for the salvation of souls, from the chapel, the school, association in all its forms, to the credit and consumer societies, and everything that the Christian spirit has invented to improve the well-being of the worker.

Your commissions each deal with one element of the corporation. When a special Congress is organised for the Christian corporation, your programme can be left to it, completed for the members of the workers' family with whom you have not yet concerned yourselves.

Outside the corporation, your motto *Sint Unum* has only a truncated meaning. The family is the basis of all human unity, and unity achieved outside the family is an incomplete unity. Can we realise for our dear workers the wish of Our Lord, *Sint Unum*, if we have only

an association of children, whose family is a stranger and often hostile to our action?

Can we do so if we stop at a circle, whose member will find at his hearth the mother of the family hostile to works she does not understand? Do we not see every day the wife keeping her husband away from the Catholic Circle, against which she is prejudiced, and finding natural the visits to the tavern which are a necessity of the times?

Besides, is the corporation a new work? Is it a new system? No: it is the harmonised whole of the means known to this day. The first basis of the corporation is association. Whoever denied its necessity would put himself in contradiction with all the members of this Congress, and of all the previous Congresses. You have taken as your title: *Union of Works for Workers*, and by that you mean Union of workers' associations. We are therefore all agreed on this first point.

The second basis is the union of the associations. You have admitted that the associations must extend to all the members of the workers' family. It is a truth proclaimed at Lyon, at Reims, and which has become a commonplace. Who would dare to deny that, in the family of our time, the mother, the father or the daughter should remain outside the action of the Catholic Church? and who does not see that the Church has never had any serious action except through associations? — But if you admit that the associations must reach the various members of one family, must you not wish these associations to be united with one another as they are among their members? Outside this union, do we not too often see war, or at least a baneful isolation? The Christian regeneration of the world of the workers would be a senseless undertaking if God were not with us, and God will bless our efforts in the measure of our union, for it is this God who said: *Sint Unum*, and this last wish of the Master is the dearest to his heart. This union, moreover, has nothing that resembles absorption, centralisation. You will be convinced, on reading the

Manuel, that this union is the surest rampart of the freedom of each and of the prosperity of all.

The corporation has as its third basis the Christian economic institutions bringing together the best means of working for the moral and material well-being of the members who compose it. Have not Catholics always regarded it as a sacred duty to develop popular education, to rebuild the Christian family by every means, to watch over the health of their brothers, to encourage thrift and to make it more fruitful by special institutions for cheap living? Have not Catholics always been concerned for work, that major interest which dominates the whole of life, and have they not sought every means of giving back to the workers the sweet and simple joys of the children of God?

All the economic institutions were invented by the Church, and the philanthropists have been able to find nothing that she had not practised long before them.

The corporation may be defined as follows:

The Christian workers' corporation is formed by the harmonised whole of various societies, which include the employers as well as the workers and the various members of the family. The corporation is established by a committee; it is based on Catholic principles, respect for social hierarchies and submission to the Church.

The associations that compose it are constituted and governed according to the two principles adopted by the Association of Catholic Workers' Circles:

- I. The devotedness of the upper class to the workers;
- II. The participation of the worker members in the internal government, under the direction of an affectionate but effective paternity.

Each association has its elected council, which really administers, under the presidency of a director or a directress.

Each association is represented in the corporative committee, the men's associations by their directors, the associations of women and

girls by delegates (the chaplain and members of the committee where the women take special charge of these associations).

The union of the associations is shown by common meetings held in good order, without confusion, where each association has a special place, under the leadership of its director or its directress and of its council.

This union is cemented by Christian charity and maintained by economic institutions, which extend the solicitude of the corporation to all the needs of its members, from the moral and material point of view. These economic institutions are governed by a council drawn from the council of the circles and from the committee.

This is not a new work; it is the logical outcome to which every man desirous of converting his brothers will be led, as soon as he has recognised the power of association.

The corporation seems a difficult work; it demands, indeed, efforts and perseverance for its foundation; but it is easier to preserve than isolated works, because the corporation is in keeping with the nature of man and with the teachings of the Church.

We may compare the corporation to a temple each wall of which would represent an association. The finished temple, with its vaults, its roofs, its buttresses, forming one single whole of its various parts, presents a solidity and gives guarantees of lasting that the isolated parts of the same building will never give.

Thus devoted priests wear out their lives to make a youth club flourish, and they observe every day with sorrow that the family works against them, often without ill will, and only because it is not imbued with the Christian spirit. Every day one hears it said: Ah! if the parents helped us, what wonders would we not achieve? — And to make up for this great means that God has established, your charity has invented the most alluring attractions; it has varied pleasures without end, and, all around you, generous souls touched by your devotedness have brought their gold. In the surveys we have made, we

have calculated what a soul cost, and we have understood that private individuals hesitate to enter so costly a path. — Do you wish to save your time, your pains, your money? Then use for the conversion of the peoples these natural agents that God has established. But does not the heart of the poorest mother hold more riches for the conversion of her son than the coffers of the bankers? Why then persist in refusing the divine means, to seek in an artificial world means as great in the efforts they require as they are small in the results they produce.

Certainly, the building of a complete temple demands more persevering efforts than the raising of a wall; but then, when the temple is built, the many faithful find in it a sure shelter against the worst weather, whereas your wall may well shield from the sun as long as it comes from the east; it may well shield from the storm, provided the showers are not too heavy; but there will come an hour in the day when this wall will no longer shield from the sun, and if the storm is too strong, not only will your wall shelter no one any more, but it will itself be swept away.

There has been talk of the method of Val-des-Bois. We reject this expression as eminently improper. We have invented nothing, found nothing new, and if the method we have used must have a name, it must be called “the apostolic method.” It was the apostles who invented it, when they established those admirable Christian corporations which so marvellously fulfilled the wish of the Master: *Sint Unum*; it is they who taught you to combine so admirably the associations, the family, the concern for moral and material well-being, in that magnificent whole which was the admiration of the pagans.

It is the Church that established the old workers’ guilds, that magnificent temple of Solomon which realised on earth the perfection and splendour of created things. The Revolution burned the temple and carried the people away to Babylon, that is to say into the land of liberalism. And behold, after more than seventy years of captivity, the

Catholics have left the land of error and have come back to this blessed land of pure and unmixed faith, where God alone is heeded, where the immortal Pius IX, his representative, alone has all authority, and here we are in your midst, asking you, to rebuild the new temple, not for vessels of gold and silver, but for resolute hearts, hands eager for work, and souls strong against discouragement. No doubt the new temple will be less beautiful, less rich than the first, but we mean to make it large enough to hold the whole workers' family; we want no one to be forsaken any more; we want all those who feel the need of a support, a refuge and a protection to find the doors of the temple open and the place assigned for each of them; and then *we shall sing hymns and praises to Jehovah, because he is good, because his mercy is for ever upon Israel, and all the people shall cry with a loud voice, praising the Lord, because the house of the Eternal shall be founded.*

When, then, will that so ardently desired day dawn at last? When will God raise up convinced men who will rise courageously with the resolve to establish the Christian corporation, the only remedy for the ills from which our poor workers suffer?

Three years ago, at Nantes, when the first picture of it unfolded before your eyes, you greeted its appearance with such joy that we thought we were touching the fulfilment of our desires.

Two years ago, at Lyon, I told you the sorrows of my heart. The devil had been at work, and the dream of Nantes had become an impossibility. I saw clearly that it would be difficult to win men over to this great practical struggle for the conversion of the factory, the kingdom of Satan. I asked you for prayer, I brought you the one that was inspired by our workers, and which they recite every Sunday for the conversion of their brothers.

Last year, at Reims, we hailed Our Lady Queen of the Factory, and we formed the league of sacrifice. The Inner Association has spread everywhere since then, and every day many devoted souls

recite that generous offering which our poor sick had long been reciting in obscurity, forgetful of their own sufferings so as to think only of the sufferings of Jesus unknown by his brothers.

At Bordeaux, we bring you the Manuel, a faithful and complete mirror of our workers' corporation, and so you have had the prayer, the sacrifice and the action. Nothing more remains for us to give.

Many times, in the evening, I have walked through the workers' districts of our great cities. My heart bled at the sight of these poor forsaken people; I asked God to suffer for them, as if the tears of my heart could relieve their miseries. — Sometimes a ray of hope crossed my mind, and I saw, as in a distant dream, the resurrection of this people and the immense benefits brought by the workers' Corporation. It would be so easy to arrive at these wonders! We have said it already: all these poor souls are lost only for want of effective help, because no one can hold out a hand to them!

Is it not enough to break one's heart, to see the indifference of Catholics before these immense evils, and the ease with which the best of them are content with little? There would be cause for despair if we did not know that Jesus is almighty, and that the workers are his well-beloved brothers.

In my feverish helplessness, I have asked God what he wanted of me for this great cause, the passion of my life. If my voice cannot convince, if the new weapons I bring you in the Manuel are not enough to decide men to attempt the great struggle, ah! I ask God as a favour to shed my blood for this noble cause. Happy if that blood becomes fruitful, and if, more powerful than my poor words, it at last raises up Apostles of the factory to run to the help of our forsaken brothers.

I. The Commission recognises that the whole of the means of religious and moral reform which has been put into practice at the mill of Val-des-Bois, under the name of *Christian workers' corporation*, has been crowned there with brilliant success, and must be pursued in similar con-

ditions with entire confidence.

The Commission considers that this whole of means may equally be attempted in an urban or rural industrial community, and that it will produce the same benefits there if it gathers the support of all the elements to which social authority belongs in various degrees.

II. The Commission recommends, as the bases of this support, those which are set out by Mr Harmel in the *Manuel de la Corporation chrétienne*, and which it indicates in the following terms:

1. The Christian workers' corporation has as its principle Catholic association based on the devotedness of the upper class to the workers, and on the participation of the worker members of the association in its government under the effective direction of an affectionate paternity.
2. The Christian workers' corporation is the harmonised whole of various Catholic associations which correspond to each of the conditions of society and to each of the elements of the family.
3. The Christian workers' corporation procures the moral and material good of its members, through economic institutions made fruitful and guarded by the Catholic spirit;
4. The Christian workers' corporation is, by the principles from which it proceeds and by the ends towards which it tends, the natural and providential development of the Association of Catholic Workers' Circles.

Harmel,
Industrialist at Val-des-Bois.

REPORT READ BY MR HARMEL, AT THE CONGRESS OF THE CATHOLIC COMMITTEES OF LILLE

at the session of 17 November.

Last year, your Congress recognised, with a rapporteur whom you are so happy to see again in your midst, that it is *necessary to organ-*

ise free and Christian associations which give back to the workers' family the benefits of the ancient guilds.

In the space of a year, the question has made great progress in people's minds; the anti-Christian schools as well as those that have God for their master, the Workers' Congress of Paris as well as the Congress of Bordeaux and the provincial assemblies held during the year by Catholics: everyone proclaims that the corporation is the only remedy to set against the present evils. After trying every novelty, after turning over and over every liberal combination, we are frightened to see the canker of pauperism grow every day. Never have there been so many savings banks, pension funds, food societies; never has the country imposed on itself such sacrifices for popular education, and never has poverty been so bitter, crimes so numerous. The blindest are obliged to recognise that all the remedies tried have produced nothing, that other, more effective ones must be resorted to, and public opinion, weary of novelties, turns back towards the past and remembers those guilds of former times which brought social peace to the world for so many centuries.

The Church has long had this clear-sightedness; and Pius IX, in his *Motu proprio* of 14 May 1852, restored the guilds of arts and crafts, without touching the freedom of commerce and industry, which is a principle of our social order. The Sovereign Pontiff proclaims that the restoration of the guilds is the *best means of securing the true good of the souls of his subjects without neglecting their private interests*. — And we too repeat after Pius IX: the Christian corporation is the true plank of salvation for our society; the only means of restoring social peace, *because it secures the true good of souls at the same time as private interests*.

What will our plan be? I find it formulated in your decisions of last year: *In the upper class, the local Committee, the head of the work; the associations of employers and of ladies, the arms of the work; and in the workers' family, the body of the work, associations which reach all*

the members of the family, linked to one another and to the Circle by one and the same religious bond.

In these notes we have especially in view the workers of large-scale industry; they are the most numerous, the most exposed and the most forsaken. Here is the formula that we think best suited to present needs, while at the same time it expresses perfectly the reality of what has been attempted with success.

The corporation is formed by the organic union of the Christian associations including the members of the families of workers and employers of one and the same trade or of similar occupations.

The corporation is governed by a Committee that includes employers of the trade; it has as its centre the Catholic workers' circle.

It has three aims: 1. To restore Christian social life in the world of the workers; 2. to work for the moral and material well-being of its members; 3. to arrive at social peace through the union of employers and workers, a union necessary to establish an industrial organisation favourable to the reign of justice, to the restoration of the family, to the freedom to do good and to Christian charity.

Christian social life will be restored by the Catholic associations, which alone give entry into the corporation; it will be maintained by the committee subject to the Catholic Church, which will be represented within it by an ecclesiastical delegate having full authority for questions belonging to the domain of conscience and doctrine; it will be shown and sustained by a church or oratory belonging to the corporation, where its members must gather for religious exercises (according to the obligation which Pius IX laid down in his *Motu proprio*).

Moral and material well-being will be made easier by the common trade of the members of the corporation; it will be procured by the economic institutions governed by a council drawn from the workers' council of the circle and from the committee, and presided over by an employer.

The third aim of the corporation will be attained: for wages, by fair agreements; for the restoration of the family, by the special protection of women and by an organisation that makes easier the mission of mothers of families; for the freedom to do good, by a Christian discipline; finally, for mutual charity, by personal relations of affection of the employers with the workers and of the workers among themselves.

FIRST AIM. — TO RESTORE CHRISTIAN SOCIAL LIFE.

Christian social life will be restored by the Catholic associations, which alone give entry into the corporation.

If we understand the corporation as Pius IX understood it, and that is the only way to understand it rightly, we must take care to compose it of Christian elements.

Since our corporations are open and rest on absolute individual freedom, we can and must demand moral conditions that are found only in associations based on religious feeling. We therefore believe it necessary to give entry into the corporation only through the Catholic associations; if the corporation existed apart from them, what guarantee would we have that it would not become impious or indifferent, and therefore powerless for the good of our society. History, moreover, agrees with us: it was the confraternities that gave birth to the corporation, and not the corporation that gave birth to the confraternities.

Since the corporation must be governed by men, it will have the Catholic workers' Circle as its centre; but it is no less indispensable to have parallel associations of children, of women and of girls, embracing all the members of the family. Modern large-scale industry has a particularly baneful influence on women; it has brought about the deepest moral degradation among girls, and among women the neglect of the most sacred duties. Through this harmful action the family is destroyed, and we can restore it only by protecting the girl and the

woman against the countless dangers that surround them, through strongly organised Catholic associations. It was therefore very rightly that, at its general assembly of 1876, the Association of Catholic Circles proclaimed this truth in the following terms: “When a circle is opened in an urban community, the same necessity as in the factory is laid upon the committee, namely: To call into being associations of women and others of young men, similar to that of the circle, so as to take hold of the families and form them into a Christian group. For if ever the strength of association was necessary, it is there, in that forsaken and so often corrupt milieu, where there sometimes still remain old traditions or at least a memory of the ancient guilds, and, in any case, a very marked current towards forming new ones, outside, alas! the Christian spirit.”

Christian social life will be maintained by the Committee subject to the Catholic Church, which will be represented within it by an ecclesiastical delegate having full authority for questions belonging to the domain of conscience and doctrine.

In the old guilds, the master was scarcely distinguished from the workman, his companion and his table-fellow; he had hardly any different role. In our days, on the contrary, the concentrations required by modern industry have given the employer a powerful authority exercised over a great number of families; and as duties are always in proportion to rights, the industrialist has new duties; his paternity must be exercised with greater initiative; he must be the founder and the protector of the corporation. That is why the Committee, as the Association of Catholic Circles has understood it, made up of Christian employers and of men devoted to the working class, is the necessary agent for the government of this great family, of which it is the collective employer.

To conform to the very wise rules laid down by Pius IX, the committee must have within it an ecclesiastical delegate approved by the

Bishop, and this delegate must have full authority in what concerns the doctrine of the Church and the sanctification of souls.

We shall thus have a serious and very necessary guarantee that the government of the corporation will always remain Christian.

Christian social life will be shown and sustained by a church or oratory belonging to the corporation, where its members must gather for religious exercises.

Article 5 of the *Motu proprio* of 14 May 1852 reads as follows:

“The competent higher authority, on the application made by a number of members recognised by the law as sufficient to form a society in each class of tradesmen and artisans, may declare the University constituted, provided it is proved that it possesses either a church or an oratory where the members of the corporation must gather for religious practices, and an income sufficient, or an endowment, to ensure the upkeep of their church or oratory and the exercise of worship.”

We know the social doctrine of the Church so little that we regard as a privilege what Pius IX imposes as an obligation; for indeed the special and common religious life of all the members of the corporation is necessary to establish, among the various associations that compose it, the spirit of family and the fusion of hearts.

The special charm of the feasts of each association is more than doubled by the presence of the other members of the family. What is more touching than the presentation of the little children whom the father and mother come to consecrate to God?

What is more delightful than the feasts of childhood, where the parents recognise with tenderness, in the little battalion honoured that day, some fresh face whose sight gladdens their heart? When there are receptions of girls, of young men and of men, is not the whole family happy to hear the promises of the new members? The feasts of the girls, with their sweet and harmonious singing, the feasts of the Circle enhanced by its resounding brass band alternating

with the deep and powerful voices, do they not borrow one charm more from the presence of the whole family, whose hearts unite to keep the feast of Jesus the Worker always? The religious instructions suited to the special needs of the hearers, adapted to their particular moral miseries, full of comparisons drawn from their trade, sum up in one whole God, the family and work. Finally, public prayer for the sick of the corporation, for the afflicted and for the dead, the wedding feasts, the general Communions and the frequent gatherings in the chapel complete this fusion of hearts, in which all joys and all sorrows become common.

SECOND AIM. — TO WORK FOR THE MORAL AND MATERIAL WELL-BEING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATION.

Moral and material well-being will be made easier by the common trade of the members of the corporation.

We can prepare the corporation only by founding trade circles with committees that include at least a few employers of the trade. As it would be difficult, in the present situation of the Catholic works, to divide our forces too much, we could, to begin with, establish only three great divisions. First, the factory workers: the various trades employed in a factory may rightly be considered as belonging to a single occupation, since they have the same laws, the same interests, the same discipline and a common life; next, the various trades practised at the domestic hearth or in small workshops; finally, the building workers.

It will be asked what is to be done with the circles founded at present without regard to trade. We think there will be fewer difficulties than one might believe at first.

Work is so major an interest for the worker that it dominates all the others; it is a condition of life or death, of comfort or poverty, of joy or despair. No work that does not concern itself with this great interest can flatter itself that it is working seriously for the well-being

of the worker. Is the Christian worker protected in his work? Unhappily not; in this respect he is almost completely abandoned; that is one of the great causes of the slight development of the Catholic works in the working class. The Christian corporation must place this great interest of its members in the first rank; it must establish, wherever it can, centres for the protection of Christian work, so as to favour the sale of the products made by the Christian worker, so as to place Christian workers in houses where their faith is respected, and if need be to concern itself with apprenticeship and with the fixing of wages by a friendly understanding with the employers who employ them.

We shall say nothing of the economic works, which you know as well as I do. They are a powerful means of making the Catholic associations popular, following the method the Church has always used.

It is essentially in the spirit of the Church to concern herself with material needs at the same time as with moral needs. The memory of the saints is eternal in the heart of the people, because they left imperishable benefits behind them. “One day,” a venerable priest told me, “I was walking in the countryside near Carcassonne, and I met a poor woman piously saying her rosary at the foot of a cross. — For whom are you praying so heartily? I asked her — Ah! *it is for that good St Marcoul*, that God may reward him for the fountains he set up in our town for the poor people!”

It is thus that material benefits, done in the name of God, give rise to a gratitude that crosses the centuries. And if the old guilds have left such lively memories, it is because of the immense benefits they brought to the world of labour.

THIRD AIM. — TO ARRIVE AT SOCIAL PEACE THROUGH THE UNION OF EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS, A UNION NECESSARY TO ESTABLISH AN INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION FAVOURABLE TO THE REIGN OF JUSTICE, TO THE RESTORATION OF THE FAMILY, TO THE FREEDOM TO DO GOOD AND TO CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

We do not wish to lengthen this report, and we shall speak only of the *freedom to do good*.

We have met employers who, on the pretext that religion is a matter of conscience, take no interest in it at all, out of a false respect for freedom. Now there is only one true freedom: the freedom to do good, and all who know modern workshops know what slavery of souls weighs upon our poor workers. The petty persecutions are often such in the workshops that they have only the choice between renouncing their faith and renouncing their wages. If the employers were in closer relations with their workers, they would know of many mysteries of iniquity that go on in their mills without their knowledge. The councils of the corporation would render, in this respect, many services to employers of good will, and would allow them to establish a truly fruitful discipline to repress vice and protect virtue.

Which of us would not be overjoyed to see a *Christian corporation* living in the midst of your great city?

In one and the same church, the employers and the workers and all the members of the family, young men and men, girls and women, grouped in associations, all these hearts forming but one heart, taught with a view to their special duties, forewarned against the dangers proper to their state; God, the family and work united in the church and in the workshop; — feasts following upon feasts in which the members of the family are in turn actors or moved spectators; — on leaving the church, orderly gatherings where the young find wholesome games, a source of frank gaiety; — councils in which the fathers of families delegated by the workers deal with the employers of the committee on everything that concerns the moral and material

well-being of the great family that they govern together, in a respectful deference on the one hand, and a condescension full of affability on the other; — the reign of Jesus Christ restored over this working people, and bringing back with it all the goods of the temporal order; — social peace through the union of masters and workers, thrift and health, the fruits of virtue, and the joy of hearts shining on the faces.

Such is the picture that you will soon contemplate with admiration, if you work to found the workers' corporations as the Church understands them.

Is this work beyond your strength? Not at all. But it is absolutely indispensable that the employers come to an understanding and take the lead in the undertaking.

Factory workers hardly enjoy the company of tradesmen, and vice versa; conversation is difficult when one does not have the same life. In the circles we have visited, wherever one of the two elements predominates, the other tends to disappear. We know many factory workers who would no longer go to the circle because they met there only comrades who had neither the same work, nor the same habits, nor consequently the same language as themselves. We have been able to observe this fact in the girls' associations too, and we are authorised by experience to state that, if the associations were formed by trades, or at least by trades having a sufficient likeness, their number would be multiplied, they would be made more compact, and consequently more prosperous. Community of life, of interests and of concerns singularly increases, and makes more intimate, the union formed by community of faith. On the workers' side, this development would be easy; it answers their aspirations, and if it is presented with prudence, it will be welcomed with great pleasure.

Moral and material well-being will be attained by the economic institutions governed by a Council drawn from the workers' Council of the Circle and from the Committee, and presided over by an employer.

Moral and material well-being may be summed up, in the temporal respect, under three heads: education, work and the economic institutions properly so called.

For *education*, we cannot insist too strongly in asking you to create *Christian vocational schools*. You have created the magnificent work of the Catholic University, and this would be a very necessary complement for large-scale industry, which would thus have its *Catholic University of arts and crafts*.

You would form a nursery of Christian foremen, and all the industrialists who hear me know what immense help such auxiliaries would bring them for the reform of their mills. This foundation would be very easy. No obstacle possible on the Government's side; the teachers are ready: they are the Brothers of the Christian Schools; pupils would present themselves ten times more numerous than the places you would have to offer them, and your young men would be sought after by all employers, whatever their religious opinions, because they would offer certain guarantees of morality; and without morality in the foreman, who does not know it? even material order is impossible.

To reach this goal, Christian devotedness is needed.

Renunciation and sacrifice will always be the condition of good. When the master sends workers into his vineyard, it is to cultivate the soil there, and the soil is hard everywhere.

All employers have received a mission from God. We have voluntarily accepted the formidable paternity of the head of an industry; we are not free to abandon its imperious duties. In vain would we shelter our desertion behind the commonplace phrases: "It is too difficult... The question is not ripe..." The difficulties will be overcome only by persevering work. God gives ripeness only to the husbandman who has turned the soil, enriched it with his sweat and sown the good grain.

If we wish to know our duties in all their rigour, let us listen to this word of the Master, a word that we shall one day hear resound over our heads: *Come to me, you blessed of my Father, for I was hungry, and you gave me to eat.* What hunger is more poignant than the hunger for truth among so many of these poor minds poisoned by error? *I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink.* Who thirsts for love like this unhappy worker who often meets in his own family nothing but harshness and ingratitude. *I was a stranger, and you took me in.* Who can say that the modern worker is not a stranger shut up in his isolation as in an exile, passing through the midst of our society without meeting a true friend to hold out a hand to him? *I was naked, and you clothed me.* Is there a nakedness worse than that garment of hate-filled ignorance and unjust mistrust in which these misguided men are clothed, led astray by the Revolution, which claims to set them free, and abandoned by the protectors God had given them? *I was sick, and you visited me.* And what is that sickness, if not the disunion of families, corruption and those countless vices that fight over the souls of these poor workers far from God? Finally, *I was in prison, and you came to me...* Is not this word, which is the last, a prophecy of that foul prison of the godless workshops, where souls perish by the thousand? Therefore, to go to them is for us a strict duty. For, says the Master: *I tell you truly, what you did to the least of my brothers, you did to me.*