

'No cooperation with Communism' from the Luxemburger Wort (5 June 1948)

Caption: On 5 June 1948, the Catholic daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort gives an account of the position of Pope Pius XII, who appeals to European Catholic workers not to be seduced by the allure of Communism.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 05.06.1948, n° spécial; 101e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Keine Zusammenarbeit mit dem Kommunismus!".

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No cooperation with Communism!

During the present Pontificate, the halls and courtyards of the Vatican have often been the venue for large audiences of workers. The most recent event of this kind took place on 23 May, Trinity Sunday, when some 6 500 workers, men and women, arrived from Rome, Naples and other parts of central and southern Italy to proclaim their religious devotion to the Pope. As Pope Pius gratefully expressed his joy and confidence in the activities of the Christian workers' unions, his thoughts went beyond the boundaries of the Italian peninsula, and his words addressed Catholic workers all over the world, vigorously emphasising their legitimate claims, as he had already done years before in the midst of the raging world war.

What is the basis for the strength and the values of Catholic workers? 'It is the well-understood feeling of your human dignity as heads of families, citizens, workers and Christians! Conscious of your strength and true to your principles, you set an example to others. Your speech, unlike that of the demagogues, does not stir the people with hollow and empty words; nor do you use fear to further your influence; strengthened by your conviction, your simple language becomes clear and open, defending the true material, social and spiritual interests of the people. Resorting neither to violence nor threats, you counter and defeat the grim and sectarian opponents with honesty and tact, with boldness and with energy.'

Is it not obvious here that Pope Pius XII is drawing a decisive line between the social action of Christians and the demagogic, terror-based agitation of Communism, which, while not shrinking from the use of ruthless means even in Italy, never misses an opportunity to curry favour? The Christian workers are constantly being invited to join the Communists, who would, after all, respect their religion and beliefs and attack only the 'upper echelons of the Church hierarchy' for being devoted to American capitalism and imperialism. The Christian workers should at least form a common action front with the Communists and not refuse the Communists' cooperation in the defence of their interests.

The Pope and the Italian bishops have stressed with sufficient clarity over the past few years that Communism is to be condemned unconditionally and that no Catholic may either be a member of or vote for the Communist Party. As recently as 22 February, Pope Pius told the tram workers of Rome: 'Despite contrary claims, which might also be spread among you, Christ's teachings of truth and faith remain irreconcilable with the principles of materialism. Whoever embraces these has — whether willingly or not, whether consciously or not — broken away from his Church and is no longer a Catholic.'

On the one hand, Communism in Italy and elsewhere tries to hamper reconstruction, since it would then lose the foundation for its agitation. The Holy Father, in his encyclical 'Optatissima Pax' of 1 December 1947, thus wrote: 'There is no lack of those who, sad to say, embitter and exploit the working man in his distress, following a secret and astute plan, and thus obstruct the heroic efforts which the forces of justice and order are making to rebuild scattered fortunes. Those who deliberately and rashly plan to incite the masses to tumult, sedition, or infringement of the liberty of others are certainly not helping to relieve the poverty of the people but are rather increasing it by fomenting mutual hatred and disturbing the established order; this can even lead to complete chaos.'

On the other hand, Communism's glittering promises receive foolish approval even from some well-meaning people. For that reason, the encyclical continues: 'May He [Christ] illumine with light from above minds which are less often moved by stubborn malice than deceived by errors under the semblance of truth.'

And, on 24 December, the Pope added: 'Herod's modern imitators do their utmost to hide their true intentions from the masses and to turn them into unsuspecting tools for their plans. But, once in power and firmly holding its reins, they will gradually drop the mask and steadily oppress human dignity and freedom, as well as any sound and independent religious activity.'

May we therefore consider the offer of cooperation, extended by such parties and movements, to be loyal? — In his encyclical 'Divini Redemptoris' (On Atheistic Communism) of 19 March 1937, Pope Pius XI had asked the Catholic press to 'warn against the insidious deceits with which Communists endeavour, all too successfully, to attract even men of good faith.' The Pope concluded that passage with the resounding

sentence: 'Communism is intrinsically wrong, and no one who would save Christian civilization may collaborate with it in any undertaking whatsoever. Those who permit themselves to be deceived into lending their aid towards the triumph of Communism in their own country, will be the first to fall victims of their error. And the greater the antiquity and grandeur of the Christian civilization in the regions where Communism successfully penetrates, so much more devastating will be the hatred displayed by the godless.'

Pope Pius XII does not consider his predecessor's warning outdated and therefore reconfirms it in his great audience of 23 May. The workers should resemble an army, 'because the prerequisite for the reconstruction of a healthy and Christian society is to ward off enemy attacks and invasions.' These enemies cunningly offer their help and cooperation, saying: 'We worship your God.' If the enemy plans are recognised for what they are, and if this offer is rejected, Communism will then try to thwart economic and social reconstruction: 'While the honest population pursues its work — everyone at their post, basing their efforts on hard-won acquisitions — other forces try to prevent and damage these activities. It is up to you to be vigilant, to pray and to continue your work.' The objective is a prudent and strong social order enabling us to live together by the principles of the Church.

There are thus two reasons why Christian workers must not respond to, and thus support, the tactics of Communism: 1. they must not accept its offer of cooperation which is cloaked in lies; 2. they must not cooperate in obstructing the road to reconstruction, as Communism would wish.

Any support of Communism, through the ballot box or by any other means, is incompatible with Christian conscience.

J. P. F.