

Frederic Ozanam

L'Ère Nouvelle 1848

THE ORIGINS OF SOCIALISM

In dealing with the origins of socialism we have gathered under that name the various schools professing it, which we could not separate in order to initiate a controversy with each of them. If many socialists are but late disciples of the worst errors of paganism, there are others who have more than one point of contact with Christian traditions, and whose principal error is to give new names to ancient virtues, to make the counsels of the Gospel obligatory, and to wish to establish on earth the ideal of heaven. We are not ignorant of how generous these illusions are, but we see the danger they entail.

Like all doctrines that have disturbed the peace of the world, socialism has no strength except by the many truths it contains mixed with many errors. This confusion lends it an appearance of novelty that astonishes weak minds. These teachings will be free from all danger when, on the one hand, the ancient truths which did not wait for the lights of the nineteenth century to be known, and, on the other hand, the ancient errors often judged by the conscience of human beings and condemned by the experience of peoples, have been shown.

It is high time to show these differences and to look for what is good in them, I mean the ancient and popular ideas of justice, charity, fraternity. It is high time to show that it is possible to defend the cause of the proletarians, to devote oneself to the relief of the suffering classes, to work for the abolition of pauperism, without being in solidarity with the preachings that have unleashed the storm of June¹, and that still keep hanging over our heads such dark clouds.

Socialism is presented as progress, when perhaps it has never been presented as progress.

¹ After the closing of the national workshops on June 19 and 20, 1848, the insurrection broke out in Paris, supported by the propaganda of the socialists and proto-communists. From the 22nd to the 26th there were fifteen hundred dead among the insurrectionists, to which should be added fifteen hundred shot without trial, and fifteen hundred others of the national guard. Archbishop Affre, Archbishop of Paris, who climbed a barricade to call the two camps to reason, was killed by a stray bullet.

attempted such a bold return to the most ancient past. Never, indeed, have socialist doctrines come so close to having taken shape as in the theocratic nations of antiquity.

When the Indian law makes the whole society already constituted, from its head to the priests, from its arms to the warriors, from its thighs to the farmers, and from its feet to the slaves, come out of the Brahma god, it is describing everything that many moderns dream of. He is making the apotheosis of the State, the classification of human beings by a superior power that judges in a sovereign way on the capacity of those beings and their works, the organization of work subjected to a discipline that leaves no place neither to competition, nor to misery, nor to all the disorders of personal freedom.

Such was the situation of the whole of the East, with the consequence that by destroying the liberty of the people, property, which is their work, and is also their protection, was abolished. The legislation of India attributed the soil to the priests; that of Persia attributed it to the king; under different names, it was the State that owned everything, the subjects having but a title in precariousness. The same principles were clothed in other forms in the first institutions of Greece, in the Dorian peoples more faithful to Eastern traditions. Hence the distinction into four classes of men among the Spartans, the equal distribution of land and its inalienability, the education of children taken from their families, the common meals, and all that discipline which made the Lacedaemonia a warlike phalanstery.

Such examples were necessary to confound the genius of Plato, when he described his ideal Republic, one of the most remarkable monuments of the capacity and at the same time of the inadequacy of the human spirit. Plato's Republic has been much quoted, but it is not noticed how many modern errors are to be found in that beautiful book. Plato begins, like the ancient legislators, by establishing a totally divine society, before which the human person is nothing. The god who has formed men has mixed gold in forming those who are to rule; silver, in the warriors; iron and bronze in the workers and artisans. However, from one generation to another gold can change into silver, and the same can happen to the other metals.

It is up to the magistrates to discover what metal the god has mixed in the souls of the children, to provide them with an education and to place them in a situation from which they will never emerge. Such a constitution implies the abolition of property. Plato wants the warriors of his Republic not to

own nothing personal, "that they have neither houses nor storehouses that are not common, that they live together like soldiers on campaign, that they sit together at table² " The ancient legislators stopped there. But the philosopher had to develop his ideas to their ultimate consequences. Having deprived human freedom of the support of property, he did not leave it the shelter of the family.

For fear that the domestic society disputes to the State the heart of the citizens, it destroys it, and deprives both sexes of the vulgar duties of marriage and parenthood, to distribute to them the public burdens, thus violating all that is natural. The women of the warriors will also be given over to the fatigues, the dangers and the glory of the men. In return, all will be common to all. The children will be common, and the parents will not know those whom they have begotten. Since births have no other purpose than to increase and perpetuate the Republic, "the magistrates will see to it that the unions are of select couples, they will carefully educate the children born of them, in order to always have a chosen flock³ ."

This is what a book that begins with the admirable distinction between the good and the useful, with the most eloquent defense of the laws of eternal justice, will lead to. Plato wanted to build the city of the gods on earth; his Republic is nothing more than a horse-breeding enterprise. That is the path that a false principle forces the best intelligences to travel, and that is why we are not surprised that the logical minds of sansimonism⁴ and furierism⁵ have reached the same extremes. But what puzzles us is that the greatest philosophical genius that ever lived, with the aid of the most harmonious language and addressing the Greeks, worshippers of beauty, accustomed to strip themselves of all modesty in corruption

² Plato, *The Republic*, Book III.

³ *Ibid*, book IV.

⁴ Sansimonism is the doctrine of Claude Henri de Rouvroy, Count of Saint-Simon (1760-1825). Immediately after the French Revolution, this doctrine defends an absolute equality of social status, and the common possession of the means of production, with the aim of creating a new industrial era. This doctrine is today largely forgotten, but it exerted a decisive influence in the 19th century, especially through the disciples of Saint-Simon such as Auguste Comte, Prosper Enfantin or Ferdinand de Lesseps.

⁵ Fourier's philosophy is a tension towards harmony. Fascinated by the universal attraction that he saw at work in human desire itself, he draws a picture of passions, in which he believes that "love has no free development in civilized society because it is only given in marriage".

of the gymnasiums, has not been able to gather twenty families to place them under its laws, and that some moderns have believed that they could move ancient Christian nations to reach that extreme baseness that repulsed some pagans. Indeed, the whole effort of reason already in the same antiquity tried to break the network of theocratic laws, and to liberate the human person by a strong constitution of the family and of property.

Roman law has no other greatness, the struggle of the people against the senate has no other aim, all the work of the jurisconsults has no other idea than to free the citizen little by little from the tyranny of a priestly patriciate, to re-establish the law of nature in domestic society, and to strengthen private domain, to protect it in all the vicissitudes of contracts and successions, and thus to lead property to that degree of perfection in which modern legislations have kept it.

But the ancients and the Romans themselves did not entirely succeed in renewing the social order. They stopped at two obstacles: on the one hand, the confusion of the spiritual and the temporal, which they maintained in principle by not recognizing the right against the State, the freedom of conscience; on the other hand, slavery which vitiated property by attributing to it a sacrilegious extension, and which dishonored work by reserving it for servile hands. Christianity alone had the courage to break with the whole tradition of pagan societies on these two subjects, and to establish two dogmas whose novelty scandalized philosophers and outraged jurisconsults; we refer to the separation of the spiritual from the temporal, and to the fraternity of all human beings. On the one hand, Christianity, by depriving the State of its dominion over consciences, emphasized human freedom, assured it in this world the asylum of the internal forum, in the other the asylum of immortality, and to firmly establish such a protective maxim, it did not spare the blood of its martyrs.

On the other hand, Christians did not profess that narrow individualism of which they have often been accused; they did not, as has sometimes been said, shut themselves up in the selfishness of their salvation. Their theology had very strong expressions to express the unity, the solidarity, the mutual responsibility of the human family. It was already much to teach the common origin of human beings and their equality before God. But union in Christ meant much more than union in Adam: Christians became more than brothers, they became members of the same body. And while Plato thanked the gods for having created him man and not woman, free and not free, and not free and not free and not free and not free.

slave, St. Paul teaches that there is no longer "neither male nor female, neither free nor slave, neither Greek nor barbarian, but one body in Jesus Christ"⁶ . "

The Christian brotherhood never had a more perfect image than that primitive church in Jerusalem, in which the multitude of believers were but of one heart and soul, and in which no poor were to be seen, for all who owned lands or houses sold them, gave the money from the sale and "laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each according to his need. "

This example has been abused and Christians have been reproached for having become unfaithful very early on to the traditions of the first times. It has not been taken into account that, unlike Plato's community, in the Jerusalem community there was nothing obligatory, and that not only was there no appeal to the sanction of public force, but it did not even engage consciences. So that when Ananias sold his field and kept back part of the price of the sale and brought the rest to the feet of the apostles, Peter reproaches him not for keeping back part, but of having lied, for, he says, "If you had been willing to keep back the field, was it not yours, and if you sell it, is not the money of the sale still yours?" To this extent did Christianity defend respect for human liberty; and as it knew that this is weak and inclined to fall, it did not wish to deprive it of the last remaining support in the ownership of property. He maintained the right to private property by protecting it with a commandment of God: "Thou shalt not steal. "He did not make divestment a precept, but a counsel, and voluntary poverty a perfection: "If you want to be perfect, sell your possessions and give them to the poor. "In the Church, property is of common right, like marriage; community and virginity are for a small number.

On the other hand, the primitive society of Jerusalem was short-lived. Only a passing imitation is to be found in Alexandria; and the common life, too liable to be corrupted in the ordinary commerce of human life, was shut up within the walls of the monasteries. But the dogma of fraternity remained in Christian preaching, spread with it through all ranks of ancient society, and succeeded in affecting the three plagues of the most suffering classes: slavery, poverty, and labor.

We know what the Fathers of the Church did for the abolition of slavery. They did more: they wanted the slaves to be honored, that is to say, the greatest number of human beings, that is to say, the authentic people, the one who

⁶ Galatians 3:28.

The day's burden and the heat were endured. At the same time that the sacred canons expressly destined a part of the alms to ransom captives, and the martyrs, before suffering martyrdom emancipated their slaves by the thousands, the Church wanted masters to learn to honor in the person of their servants "Christ, who took the form of a slave, who chose as his images Moses abandoned at the waters, and Joseph sold to the Egyptians, and who came to serve to free us⁷."

Sacred antiquity is full of such teachings. But whatever he did for slavery necessarily affected poverty, that other kind of slavery which the ancients also saw as a curse of the gods. Christianity had only twelve apostles to preach the faith when it appointed seven deacons to serve the poor. In all the churches the attention to the poor was organized with a great regularity and efficiency of which Rome gave example: when St. Lawrence was ordered by the prefect of the city to deliver *his* treasures, he presented to him the multitude of widows, orphans and sick people supported by the Roman deaconries.

But the wisdom of the Church and the sincerity of her love for the poor is revealed in full force precisely in the fact that she knows too well how great their ills are and how affected she is by their pains to believe that she will ever be able to do away with them. That is the reason why she devotes herself to rehabilitating a human situation which she does not expect ever to be able to remove, that is the reason why she surrounds the poor with all the respect that can be given them on earth and with the promises of heaven.

The pagans, surprised by a predilection so contrary to nature, reproached the Christians for treating with honor the fullers, the carders, and the shoemakers; for gaining for their sect only ignorant old men, women, people of low estate, all those whom idolatry removed from their temples as profane people, and whom philosophy refused to admit to their schools as unworthy. But St. John Chrysostom praised his fathers in the faith for "to have taught to philosophize those who were considered the least among men, the workers and the herdsmen⁸." Indeed, poverty had two

⁷This idea is found in many Fathers, especially in Meliton of Sardis, *Sermon on the Passover*.

⁸"There is no worker, no slave, no *woman* so simple, no child, no person so short-minded who does not understand these maxims without any difficulty, and that very clarity is as the mark and character of their truth." (*Homilies on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*).

characteristics which commended it to the veneration of Christians: the first was suffering, and the second was labor. While the sages, with Cicero, professed that "labor can have nothing of a liberal character," Christianity proclaimed that labor was the primitive law of the world practiced by the Savior in the workshop of Nazareth, by St. Peter the fisherman, and by St. Paul the tentmaker.

It preached it not only as the duty of fallen man, but as the rule of regenerated man, as the discipline of the perfect life; and when Christianity led the anchorites into the deserts of the Thebaid, it freed them from all the ordinary duties of life, except manual labor. Moreover, it assigned to work a place in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The excavators of the catacombs were included in the number of the clerics. St. Jerome puts it this way: The first "order of the clergy is that of the gravediggers who, after the example of Tobias, are charged with burying the dead, in order that, taking care of the visible things, they may walk towards the invisible." It is not easy to understand what revolution Christianity was preparing not only in the morals, but also in the economy of Roman society by thus exalting labor, when the scarcity of it was the plague not only among the upper classes, but also among the multitudes who expected to receive their bread in the distributions of the emperor; while the abandoned lands caused the poverty of the empire and were the object of the greed of the barbarians.

There is no doctrine with a strong religious or philosophical content that is resigned to remain enclosed in consciences, that does not aspire to educate peoples, and in this sense the Gospel is also a social doctrine. From the time of the persecutions we have seen it introducing into the world the principles of freedom and fraternity that would end up renewing its face. But it is necessary to know how far he carried these principles, to what extent he limited them, and finally, what he did for the economic organization of society in the times when he seemed to be able to dispose of everything as lord and master, that is, in the Middle Ages.

Perhaps never were the principles introduced by Christianity in so much danger as when they had just overcome the resistance of the Roman Empire and were introduced both in the laws and in the customs. The barbarians who invaded the empire knew neither liberty nor fraternity. The paganism with which they were penetrated had taught them nothing but the inequality of men before the gods. The deep disorder that operated in them left room only to a savage independence, to a selfishness enemy of all law, to the thirst for gold, to the thirst of the gods, and to a thirst for the love of the gods.

and blood. The traditions of the Germans are full of those fratricidal combats to which heroes give themselves up for a disputed treasure, and when they enter the Roman provinces, the first condition they impose is to share the land. These were the men whom the Church had to teach to respect the goods of others and Christian charity. He began by having the children repeat to him that seventh commandment of the Decalogue which the Church had never renounced: *Non furaberis*, and he placed upon it the sanction of ecclesiastical penance. One reads on a ninth century form intended for the confession of barbarian neophytes: Have you committed any robbery with force or violence? Have you burned the house or farm of another person⁹ ?" When theology thundered divine threats on the violent who attacked property, it also had arguments to defend it against the sophists.

It is necessary to see with what force and with what passion the schools of the Middle Ages treated controversies that seem new to us. Open the *Summa* of St. Thomas and you will find in it this impressive question: "Is it permissible to have something in property?" You will find summarized in it all the arguments of communism, the answer is supported by that opinion of Cicero that property is not of natural right; it is reinforced by all that the Fathers of the Church have written about the right of the poor to the superfluous things of the rich.

But St. Thomas, and all scholasticism with him, replies that if property is not the work of nature, it must be recognized that it is a legitimate conquest of reason, an institution not only permitted, but necessary; and he gives three reasons for this: "First, that everyone is more earnestly engaged in producing when the produce is for himself; secondly, that there is more order in human affairs when each person has the exclusive right to a thing; finally, that there is more peace when things are shared out than when they are held in undivided ownership, as is seen by the endless processes of those who hold something in undivided ownership."

In opting for judicious considerations, St. Thomas does not renounce the demanding maxims of the Fathers, he does not hesitate to reproduce those words of St. Basil and St. Ambrose: "The bread you keep for yourself belongs to those who are hungry; the clothes you store belong to the indigent who are naked; the shoes that rot in your closet belong to the wretched who are in need; the shoes that rot in your closet belong to the poor who are in need; and the shoes that rot in your closet belong to the poor who are in need".

⁹ In Régimon de Prüm's collection of canons, *De synodalibus causis et disciplinis ecclesiasticis*.

walk barefoot; and it is the poor man's money that you hide in the ground. "The socialists know these texts, and have abused them. But St. Thomas explains them by completing them with other sayings of St. Basil that should not be separated from the previous ones: "Why then do you have things in abundance, while the other has to beg, if it is not so that you have the merit of using them well and he the merit of patience?" And he concludes that by natural right the superfluous of the rich is due to the needs of the poor, but since there are many needs and the goods of one alone are not enough for all, the economy of Providence leaves to each one the free dispensation of his goods.

This distinction, which is reduced to that of perfect duties and imperfect duties accepted by all jurists, contains the solution to the problems that concern us. That solution reconciles the apparent contradiction of justice and charity: it is resolved by voluntary dispossession instead of spoliation, and by voluntary sacrifice instead of robbery¹⁰. Christianity therefore did not weaken private property; on the contrary, it preserved it as the very matter of sacrifice, as a condition of voluntary dispossession, as a part of that freedom without which man achieves no merit. But at the same time that Christianity placed freedom under its protection, it oriented it towards self-denial, towards self-abnegation, towards the practice of fraternity.

If it defined theft as a crime, it made almsgiving a precept, the voluntary divestment of goods a counsel, and community a perfect state, which in a more or less finished form was valid for all levels of Catholic society. In order not to leave the precept of almsgiving at the mercy of the interpretations of selfishness and greed, the Church proceeded to a programmatic evaluation of the superfluous of each person, fixing it at one tenth of the income. But it also warned the rich that after paying their tithes, their crops were still subject to the needs of the poor to a degree known only to God. The tithes and the accumulated offerings of the faithful formed the ecclesiastical patrimony, whose original primitive nature should not be judged in the light of the abuses of much later times.

In the language of law, the goods of the Church have left the domain of property, they are *res nullius*; they now constitute the domain of God, the inheritance of Christ, *Patrimonium Christi*. These qualifications are not, as has been thought, empty titles designed to contain the usurpations of the

¹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, 2a 2ae, qq 32, 66 (author's note).

kings, to encourage the generosity of the people. Since these goods have no owner other than God, their usufruct belongs to the entire community of the faithful, and the ecclesiastical incumbents are only their administrators and guardians. And so that these guardians do not fall into the temptation of administering them arbitrarily, the Church calls them to account for their administration.

Already in the sixth century St. Gregory the Great cites the ancient laws that divided the income of the Church into four parts: the first, for the bishop, his guests and the guests to whom the door should never be closed; the second, for the clergy; the third, for the conservation of the buildings; the fourth, for the poor¹¹. A capitulary of the Carolingian time imposes more severe conditions on the clergy of Gaul. It is said in it "that the bishop takes care of the ecclesiastical goods so that they are distributed to all those who are in need, and that it is done with a sovereign respect and a sovereign fear of God.

Let him also take what part he needs, in case he should have need." Undoubtedly, the perversity of customs often violated the will of the laws, but we find them cited again and again even in the most relaxed centuries; and in matters of goods, the synods of Rouen, of Aix and of Bordeaux, in 1585 and 1614, still speak like St. Gregory and like Charlemagne.

Since there was no absolute ownership of ecclesiastical goods, there was no right to dispose of them. Hence came the inalienability of these goods, which had no exception except for the relief of the poor in time of famine, for the redemption of captives, and for the liberation of slaves. In these three cases Christian society exercised the rights of God, the supreme owner; thus St. Gregory the Great explains in giving freedom to the slaves of the Church: " Since Our Redeemer, author of all creatures, has willed to clothe Himself with flesh and humanity in order to break with full power the chains of our servitude, and restore to us primitive freedom, it is an act of salvation to give civil freedom by manumission to those whom the law of the people reduced to slavery, but whom nature had made free¹² ."

Apart from a few exceptions provided for by law, inalienability had some effects that are not sufficiently known. What was in the

¹¹ Gratian, *Decretum*

¹² Surprisingly, *this* reference will be found in an 1831 work of the Sansimonian school, which Ozanam was able to read.

more democratic than those assets of dead hands, than those benefices that circulated from holder to holder, that provided the means of life to the family of a poor priest, with which he could take care of his elderly parents, give dowries to his sisters, instruction to his nephews, and which then passed into other hands to meet other needs, support new vocations, and thus contribute to the progressive elevation of that third estate that found in the ranks of the clergy administrators of its fortune, as well as defenders of its rights?

Perhaps the canonists did not realize this consequence emanating from their principles. The aspects on which they insisted had a greater breadth and audacity. They saw the Church as the alms-giver of Providence, in charge, as it were, of the general expenses of civilization, of all that contributed to make Christian society more compassionate, more enlightened and more brilliant. It was in charge of hospitality, and that word embraced all the duties of public beneficence, all the institutions that charity could imagine from the time of the institution of deacons by the apostles to the hospitals and leper colonies of the Middle Ages. It was in charge of education, and therefore of maintaining educational centers of all levels, from the lessons of the teacher who taught catechesis to the children of the smallest parish to the universities that came to have as many as forty thousand students around the chairs of their doctors.

It was, finally, the patron of the arts and the promoter of those immense works that covered the whole of Europe with monuments that have constituted in some way the education of modern genius, at the same time that it formed generations of stone carvers, masons, workers of all kinds, who were our fathers. In this way the Church subtracted part of earthly things from the egoism of individual property in order to place them at the service of the public good.

This is an idea expressly stated in the canons: "the earth was not divided until it was cursed, and once purified by redemption, it must return as far as possible to its primitive state of common ownership¹³". But the primitive community of the earthly paradise, like that of Jerusalem, was too high an ideal for the practical wisdom of Christianity ever to hope to make it the common law of the human race. The secular clergy itself was too close to the earth, too much mixed up with the interests, with the passions of the

¹³ Graciano, 12

crowd so that he could hold on to such a difficult tradition. The ecclesiastical law that forbade him to marry did not dare to forbid him to own property. But since Christianity could not renounce a perfection it had from the beginning, he took steps to have it practiced in the monasteries.

St. John Chrysostom already described with admiration those cenobites "who do not know what is mine and what is yours, two words guilty of so many wars, who had the same discipline, the same table, the same clothes, without poor, without rich, without blushing and without pride¹⁴". But only later, in the Rule of St. Benedict, can we find the most perfect code of common life.

It took five centuries of Christianity, the prolonged apprenticeship of the anchorites of the Thebaid, of the monks of Palestine. It took all the efforts of holiness and genius combined to finally be able to bring together, without risk, under the same roof, men who were already Christians, prepared for all kinds of austerities and humiliations. Human nature is so horrified by dependence, the first condition of every community! The Rule of St. Benedict wants "that capital vice to be removed from the monasteries, that no religious dare have as his own even a book or tablets: and that everything, the Rule goes on to say, be common to all, so that there be no partiality, but that needs be taken into account.

Therefore, let him who has less need give thanks to God and not be envious, and let him who has more need humble himself for his weakness. "To the community of goods is joined that of work: 'For idleness is the enemy of the soul... and if the poverty of the place, the need, or the harvest of fruits keeps the religious constantly busy, let them not be afflicted; for they will truly be monks if they live by the work of their hands. But let everything be done with measure, keeping in mind the weak."

No doubt one will recognize in these few lines some of the more striking doctrines that have recently stirred the spirits: abolition of property, equality of wages, organization of work, remuneration to each not according to his aptitudes, but according to his need. More than one passage recently applauded with great acclaim seems nothing more than a page torn from the rule that St. Benedict wrote eleven hundred years ago for a small number of pious disciples in the solitude of Montecasino.

¹⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies*, 73 (author's note).

But St. Benedict knew that such a sacrifice of the human person is not made half-heartedly. That is why, along with poverty, he called for chastity and obedience; chastity that abolishes the inequality of domestic burdens and uproots man from the earth by freeing him from the family; obedience that no longer allows him to bargain with the detachment of his goods once he has carried it out of his own free will.

But poverty, chastity and obedience are not concessions made out of seduction or fear. St. Benedict esteemed the heart of man too highly not to know that he could not ask of it such a sacrifice except in the name of God, not to hope to obtain it for any other reason than love, and to preserve it by means other than prayer and the continual practice of Christian asceticism. That is why he wanted the chanting of the psalms to bring the monks together seven times a day in the same thought, and he made the renewed offering of their voluntary sacrifice go up to heaven. That is why he promised them their reward elsewhere than on earth, for he never thought that men could be brought together in a common life, that is, in a life of deprivation, of abnegation, of continuous subordination, in the name of well-being, in the name of selfish passions, of the pride that wants to command, and of the sensuality that wants to enjoy.

Under these conditions the rule of St. Benedict made such rapid conquests in the time of the great invasions; in the midst of that barbarism which was characterized above all by hatred of work, the Benedictine militia formed legions of workers, agricultural colonies of several thousand monks who ploughed half of France, Germany and England.

Later, the monastic law spreads and becomes more agile in order to adapt itself to all forms of human activity, and to foster under its discipline all kinds of industries. The Beguines of Flanders weave wool, while the Humiliates of Milan apply themselves to the work of silk, and the Friars builders to erect bridges and construct roads through Provence and Italy¹⁵. Poverty always remains the first law of these laborious corporations; but voluntary poverty, humble poverty, the poverty that does not hate the rich.

And St. Francis, that passionate lover of poverty who declares himself her husband, who is consumed by love to make his disciples love and honor her, concludes his instructions with these words

¹⁵ A medieval order, legendary in all probability, and believed in the 19th century to associate pious and disinterested men to build bridges and maintain them, especially on the Rhone, at the time of the Avignon popes.

words in which the whole social economy of Christianity in the Middle Ages is summed up: "Let the brethren have nothing as their own, neither house, nor land, nor anything else... and let them not be ashamed of it, for the Lord in this world became poor for our sake. But I warn you not to despise, not to judge those whom you see clothed in sumptuous apparel, and nourished with dainty food. But each one must judge and despise himself¹⁶ . "

In studying the organization of property and labor in the Middle Ages we have had to begin with the Church because, being mistress of herself, and removed by celibacy from the most complicated conditions of human life, she carried out almost completely the ideal of Christianity. But the ecclesiastical hierarchy penetrated secular society in all its aspects, molded it in its own image, brought down upon it in all ranks, even in the lowest, the two laws of liberty and fraternity, which it wanted to reign in society. At the top of the secular society, and in the very bosom of that warlike aristocracy, the offspring of the barbarian conquerors and still agitated by their passions, feudal legislation attempted to reconcile the rights of the individual and those of the community by subjecting the ownership of land to conditions unknown in antiquity.

The fief is no longer the absolute dominion defended by the Roman jurisconsults, the right to use, to enjoy, to dispose without reservation. The fief is nothing more than the useful domain, that is to say, the right to enjoy and to transmit, on condition of fulfilling a certain number of services in money and war services. The feudal lord, and by him the society of which he is the head, retains eminent domain, the right to deprive of his fief the unfaithful vassal or incapable of fulfilling his duties. Hence comes the claim of kings, maintained for so long by the complaisance of legists, that in law the prince, and consequently the State, is the sole proprietor, and that he can therefore grant to his subjects as he pleases the usufruct of all the property which he considers his own.

But the law rejected this exorbitant interpretation; it did not tolerate the feudatory being stripped of his fief without the judgment of his peers. And the baron who paid his debt on the battlefield was no less inviolable behind the battlements of his castle than the ancient Roman in the precincts of his camp under the protection of the god Limen. In this way political solidarity was guaranteed, and dignity was not disintegrated.

¹⁶ Regula et vita fratrum minorum, art. 2 and 5.

personal. In the third estate, the same fact occurred as in the nobility.

What was stronger than the spirit of property in those villages where the bourgeois did not hesitate to resist the spears of the nearby lords to defend the freedom of their markets and their homes? But it was precisely in those battles that the principle of community was born, that the free cities were given their name, the name of communes. These corporations of burghers, recognized by the feudalism they have defeated, with the help of royalty, on which they rely by alliances, believe themselves secure only insofar as they know themselves to be rooted in the earth. The first sign of the power of the cities is that they buy and plant, they build, they have communal property.

The most ambitious republics of Italy, Pisa, Genoa, Venice, gloried in having a church, a bridge, a street named after them in the ports of the Near East. Those Italian merchants were undoubtedly the least disinterested of all human beings and the proudest of being proprietors; but they knew the power of association, and that is the reason why it cost them nothing to build the cathedrals and palaces by which the commune secured its being for centuries, and secured the respect of posterity. They managed that, even the serfs, freed from the ancient slavery by Christianity, knew the secret of associating in order to possess.

Recent research by Troplong and Dupin has brought to light the hitherto unknown economy of those agricultural communities of serfs or users of dead hands' goods which, from the 12th century to the 16th century, covered, so to speak, all the provinces of France. As the lord was the natural heir of the serf, the serfs took their measures so that their succession would not be diverted to the hands of the lord, and replaced the possessors, when they died, by associations that could not die.

These societies of bread and salt, as they were known, brought together the members of the same family who lived on the same bread (*com-pani*), under a chief who was called the chief of the stonecutter (of earth). An ancient jurisconsult¹⁷ describes this common life, which freed the serf condition from its degradation and elevated it to a patriarchal condition: "According to the custom of the fields, in that country of Nivernais several persons must join together in a family to maintain the property, which requires a lot of work. The families thus formed by several persons, all employed, each according to his age, sex and means, are ruled by one only

¹⁷ Guy Coquille (1523-1603), *Questions sur les coutumes* (author's note).

who receives the name of lord of the community, elected to office by the others, who has authority over all the others, is in charge of the business offered in the cities, fairs and elsewhere, and has power to bind the members of the association....

In these communities, children, who do not yet know how to do anything, are cared for in the hope that they will do so in the future. The vigor of their age is taken into account in order to assign them appropriate jobs. The elderly are taken into account, for their advice and for the memory of what they have done in the past. And so, with all ages and in all possible ways, they come to form a body politic which, by subrogation, must last forever."

If this way of being had the dignity of patriarchal customs, it also preserved freedom. Just as Lot separates from Abraham, and Jacob from Esau, so the members of the community, when they tire of sharing the same bread and salt, are free to break the union. As a sign of separation, the head of the house, taking the bread from the common meal, gives them a piece for each new family that is to form the new association. In the Middle Ages, as today, the question of property was not separated from that of work. The serf communities have shown us the organization of work in the fields. It remains to be seen that of the craftsmen's trades, and the condition of the industrial populations, which should not be described, as has been done, as subject to the scepter of kings and the iron rule of clerics.

Nothing has been invented so apt to separate human beings from high thoughts and serious duties as industrial labor, which does not even leave them, as it does the husbandman, the vision and teachings of nature. But by an admirable economy, it turns out that these men, separated from nature, feel anxious for a more imperious need of society, and seek in the company of their equals the moral satisfactions which the human heart cannot do without.

The Roman laws attributed to Numa the distribution of artisans into nine corporations (*collegia, sodalitates*), which existed during all the centuries of the republic, were the object of imperial legislation, and sometimes created problems for him. Christianity received them as one of the ruinous remains of the ancient civilization which it saved and sanctified. St. Gregory the Great writes to the magistrate of Naples to recommend the corporation of soap makers, and the city of Ravenna, in the eighth century is divided into communities of trades (*scholae*) that form as many militia corps for the defense of the popes against attacks.

of the iconoclastic emperors.

In place of the avaricious gods of the Roman artisans, the Church put the patronage of the saints, examples of justice and resignation; in place of the orgies, the alms, the community of merits and prayers. She gave to those regenerated corporations the Christian name of confraternities. The tutelage of religion was necessary to protect the working classes against the pretensions of feudal power. The lord, owner of the land, also believed himself to be the owner of labor, which needed his protection. It was necessary to buy from him the trade that was exercised in the shadow of his castle, which he covered with his sword. From this situation arose between the two principles of authority and freedom a conflict of which one cannot trace the evolution in the Middle Ages without recognizing in it half of the conflicts of our days. It seems that freedom, disturbed by the ordinances of the princes, took refuge above all in the secret discipline of the guilds.

Without having to go back to the time of King David himself at the beginning of the construction of the temple of Jerusalem for its creation, it can be admitted with Perdiguer that its traditions are reminiscent of the East, of the crusades, and that the temple from which they come is probably that of the Templars. In any case, since the century in which the cathedrals of Strasbourg and Cologne were erected, a whole population of architects, stonemasons and masons, with their secret government, their laws and their courts, has been gathered in the workshops of these great buildings.

The judge of the Masonic Grand Lodge of Strasbourg does not preside without a symbol of sovereign justice being placed at his side. It would be too prolix to try to follow in the customs of France and Germany all the groupings of guilds, to prove their antiquity by the symbolism of the rites, by the candor of the legends; to show, finally, those useful and dangerous institutions which immersed the workers in a solidarity of good works and dangers, resistant to all penal repressions, and always reborn, according to the comparison of Perdiguer, "like the grass, which works and grows underground, and reappears on the surface".

Authority dominates, on the contrary, in the organization of the bodies of state, to which it recognizes in France the royal power, and whose customs, collected by order of St. Louis and by the care of Etienne Boileau, provost of the merchants, constituted the book of the *Établissements des métiers*. Three kinds of trades are distinguished in it: some belong to the king, who buys them, unless he has already donated or sold them, such as

Louis VII donated the privilege of five offices to the wife of one of his favorites. The others are exercised with the prior authorization of the provost of the merchants. The last ones are free. But they all constitute as many distinct guilds which have their leaders, and whose regulations determine the number and age of the apprentices, the duration of the work, the amount of the salary, the quality of the merchandise.

Often, in the dust of these ancient statutes, one discovers provisions that have preserved all the perfume of Catholic charity. For example, speculators and grocery sellers are forbidden to buy in advance and at an appointed date carloads of food, "because the rich would buy all the goods, and the poor, nothing".

For example, too, the goldsmiths must open their crucibles in shifts on feast days or Sundays, and the money they earn on that day will be put into the confraternity's coffer "to give a meal to the poor of the hospital on Easter day." Other regulations recall the most serious events of the moment or the most recent decisions of the workers' commission.

The worthy magistrate, referring to a letter from Queen Blanche, decides that "the said workers will go to work every day at sunrise, in good conscience, and will work until the hour of vespers," and subsidiarily, "that by consensus of the different parties, for the common benefit, none of the said participants in the said trade, neither the master, nor the workers, will work until the hour of vespers, in good conscience, and shall work until the hour of vespers", and subsidiarily "that by consensus of the different parties, for the common good, none of the said participants in the said trade, neither master, nor workman, nor apprentice, shall work during the night in the said trade, and whoever is found working at night, shall be punished for it". Undoubtedly, the Luxembourg court would not have decided the question of working hours in such a strict manner. It is true that it did not offer the same guarantees to the public esteem, and that it did not have as its head a respectable Étienne Boileau, a true magistrate of work, and so inflexible in questions of property that he declares his godson guilty of theft, and a certain compadre of his for having refused to pay a debt.

The institutions of the guilds thus anticipated by six centuries the supposed benefits of the organization of labor; and they also anticipated its dangers. The legislation of St. Louis already took into account everything that has been tried in our time, industry regulated by the State,

the law taking up the cause of the worker against the arbitrary actions of the masters, all the professions converted into as many public workshops, in which only the number of apprentices necessary to recruit the workers was allowed. But at the same time one could foresee all the excesses of authority in a domain that was not its own: oppression of the consumer, forced to suffer the law of an industry without competition, which did not allow rivalry among French merchants, nor union among foreign merchants; oppression of the producer, to whom the regulations left neither free access to the guilds of his choice nor the power to introduce progress in manufacturing procedures.

These were the means by which the guilds came to be burdened with abuses, until they were revolted against first by the genius of Turgot, and then by the decrees of the National Assembly. They perished like so many other institutions which that impatient century found it easier to abolish than to reform. If this rapid exposition of the public economy of the Middle Ages be summed up, and all that was mingled in it of error and human passions be removed, it will be seen in what Christianity precedes it, and in what respects it rejects the doctrines of socialism. What it introduced, what it propagated under all its forms was, in the temporal as well as in the spiritual realm, the spirit of association.

While modern legislators pursue the ideal of a political order in which the State has before it only individuals whose insubordination never endangers it, the Church, on the contrary, that great society which seems to abhor resistance more than any other, was not afraid to authorize and multiply in its midst all kinds of communities, from the national, provincial and diocesan Churches, whose privileges it recognized, to the religious orders, which it honors, and to the last confraternities, which it blesses. The Savior having promised that he would be found in the midst of those who gather in his name, how can it be surprising that, in the Christian age, human beings felt the profound need to gather together, to unite their interests, whether in those communes that were also formed in the name of Christ and proclaimed him their king, or in those civil organizations that had their religious discipline, their chapels, the Virgin and the saints on their banners?

But Christianity never wanted anything that was not free association, and that is what it achieved by the very multiplication of religious corporations among which it allowed vocations to choose for

to commit oneself to them. And that is the reason why the prolonged trials of the novitiate were placed at the very entrance to the monastic life; that was the reason why, in the temporal order, every compromise could be dissolved, from the high feudatory who could renounce his lord in the prescribed manner, to the peasant who broke the association of bread and salt by claiming his share of land. Christianity would never have given its consent to that forced community which, taking the human person from birth, and leading him to the national school, to the national workshops, would make of him nothing more than a soldier without will in the industrial army, a wheel without intelligence in the machine of the State.

Thus, between the industrialism of the last century and the socialism of the present century, only Christianity has foreseen the only possible solution to the enormous problems that distress us, and it is the only one that has reached the point at which the best minds of today end up, after many twists and turns, preaching association, but voluntary association.

We have found in Christian society all that is true of socialists. From the time of the catacombs and through the long centuries of the Middle Ages, times still agitated by the passions of barbarism, we have seen Christianity, that stern guardian of liberty, of property, of the family, nevertheless preach self-denial, honor poverty, and make community an ideal which it strives to realize in all degrees of religious and civil life by monastic institutions, by the economic system applied to the goods of the Church, and by all kinds of voluntary associations. These were the great lessons, though full of risks, like all that is great. Certainly, they were not pleasant, they will never be pleasant to the wicked rich, to the proud, to those who have nothing to gain in that world where fraternity reigns, nor will they be able to hear without trembling the *Vœ divitibus* (*Woe to the rich!* -Trd.) of the Gospel, nor the threats of the letter of James against the oppressors of the poor.

But neither is it seen that they please much more the wicked poor, the carnal, and all those who in the doctrine of resignation have never seen anything but an artifice of the clergy to ensure the tranquility of the great by means of the silence of the multitudes. There has not been a century in which a teaching so harsh to human impatience has not revolted many spirits, in which many have not accused the Church of holding the Gospel captive, and in which they have not torn up those pages to give them a materialistic interpretation, to

to give the divine promises an earthly meaning, and to exchange the community of sacrificial life for a community of pleasures. This is what heresy has done in all the centuries, and what must be studied, if only to find out whether socialism, in which some such ancient truths are to be found, has brought at least some novelty in its errors. If the first examples of socialist errors are lost, as we have seen, in the obscurity of pagan theogonies, we must expect to see them reappear in the heretics of the first centuries, heirs of paganism.

A detailed comparison would probably show more relations than one would think between the pantheism of some Gnostics and the cosmogony of Fourier with his Pythagorean theory of numbers, with the hymenaeums they celebrate among the stars and the fabulous transformations he expects for nature and for humanity. But the similarity appears clearly above all in practice: on both sides one sees the same rebellion against the narrow morality of the crowd, the same effort to replace the tyranny of duty by the law of attraction. Already in the time of the Fathers of the Church the Egyptian Carpocrates professed the new science (gnosis), the liberating science destined to rescue men from the dominion of the evil spirits that make the world groan under the injustice of their laws. Nature itself, he went on to say, wants the common enjoyment of all things: of the earth, of goods, of women; it is human institutions that, by inverting the legitimate order, repressing the primitive instincts of the soul, have introduced disorder and sin. His son Epiphanius, in a book on justice, summarizes these maxims in the two great words of equality and community; and an inscription recently discovered in Africa testifies that those communists of the second century had found their Icaria and built their phalanstery.

The community of all goods and of women descends from the source of divine justice and constitutes perfect happiness for the good people separated from the blind populace. It is to them that Zarades¹⁸ and Pythagoras, the "noblest of the hierophants, have taught to live together¹⁹ ." We know that modern Icarians respect marriage, and that Fourier's disciples have cast a veil over the mysteries of that cult of love dreamed of by their master. But the sectarians of the first centuries, logicians more consistent, did not consecrate the right to

¹⁸ Zarades is Zoroaster or Zarathustra.

¹⁹ Moefder, *Essai sur l'origine des gnostiques*; Munter, *Essai sur les antiquités gnostiques*.

to enjoy it and then to put limits to it, and by suppressing freedom they did not intend to save the family, of which property is a defensive wall. The inflexibility of their doctrine was what made it strong and enduring, for all ecclesiastical antiquity is witness to the obstinacy of their proselytes, and even St. Augustine knew of misguided Christians who gave themselves the name of apostolic, because they proscribed conjugal union and did not allow private property. It had to be the holy doctors, those men so severe with themselves, who renounced all the legitimate enjoyments of the heart, to whom no desert seemed too harsh, no fast too austere, who took up the defense of marriage and property, not only against the lax, who wanted total community, but against the rigorists, who preached total abstinence.

In this way they showed that Christianity, the most generous of religions, is also the most sensible, that it shows itself to be divine both for having penetrated into the immensity of God and for having known the limitations of the human being. The Roman Empire perished, but such is the power of ideas that even false ones outlast empires, and the error of the Gnostics was perpetuated in the Manichean sect, which, long expelled to the depths of the East, re-emerged in the Middle Ages and covered all of Western Europe under the various names of Cathars, Patharines and Albigensians.

At first sight, nothing seems less flattering to human passions than this ancient heresy inspired by the three religions of Buddha, Zoroaster and Christ. Between a sovereignly pure god, author of light and spirits, and the principle of evil, creator of matter and darkness, souls are agitated, whose destiny is to free themselves from material bonds in order to ascend towards God by a series of expiations in the present life, or by the degrees of a metempsychosis in a later life. The whole effort of the Manichaeic law will thus consist in breaking the bonds that chain its disciples to the defiled flesh and the accursed earth; it condemns the family and property. But it is dangerous to make nature lose hope by an anathema without remission, for every doctrine that does not raise our nature after discovering that it is a fallen nature, precipitates it into the abyss.

Since Manichaeism knew no other crime than that of perpetuating the captivity of souls by the propagation of the human species, it condemned only fecund unions, permitted all the horrors of sterile orgy, and suppressing as the invention of theologians the ideas of

adultery and incest, that proud system, starting from universal continence, ended in promiscuity. It gloried also in professing abstinence from all perishable goods, and opposed to the selfishness of the orthodox, who added land to land and house to house, the poverty of its elect, who were detached from the earth and had all possessions in common.

But this maxim led them to consider the barrier that defends the goods of others as null and void, the human powers that defend it as usurpers, and the robbery that overthrows it as lawful. A doctrine so contrary to the established order, in which she saw nothing but a disorder hateful to God and unbearable to men, had to try to make itself real in a field other than that of mere ideas, and I am not surprised that it became a militant political doctrine, armed for a war of which she saw the model in the eternal struggle of the two principles of good and evil.

And when it is known that Manichaeism in the thirteenth century had secured the alliance of all evil passions, all the nerve of a powerful discipline, a pontiff, bishops, more than four thousand ministers, sixteen churches and an infinite number of believers, that it had forty-one schools in the single diocese of Passau, who was master of half of Lombardy, of the country of Languedoc, who organized armies, and who the Albigensians opened hostilities by burning castles, simmering their enemies, and then eating their hearts, one can understand what danger Christian civilization was in; One can understand how the honor of our ancestors was outraged, how those sons of the crusaders, those husbands, those fathers took up their swords and swore, in a war of which the Church condemned the excesses, to exterminate an impure sect, which threatened at once the inheritance, the cradle, the nuptial bed, and which promised to destroy the sources of the human race.

Too little is known about the dangers of that time when Christianity is thought to have reigned effortlessly over unarmed intelligences. The defeat of the Albigensians was not complete, for their maxims infiltrated the very heart of the religious militias created to combat them. When St. Francis put at the service of the Church the poorest and therefore the most daring community ever, he foresaw that poverty would have its temptations and bare feet its pride; that was the reason why he warned his disciples, as has been said, not to despise the rich. Towards the middle of the same century St. Bonaventure, promoted to the general government of the order, felt

motivated to remind his brethren that the Savior was poorer than they, and forbade them to criticize publicly the life of spiritual and temporal superiors. At the same time, St. Thomas Aquinas, after having so strongly defended the cause of the mendicant orders, establishes this thesis, which is surprising that it met with opposition: "it is permitted to possess property." It is that, in fact, the passion for poverty, which had become a hatred of all property, was not limited to a vain verbal struggle. While the Franciscans, in school disputes, forbade each other to possess in property even the food they consumed, a doctrine was beginning to make its way, similar in more than one point to the new gospels that our century has heard preached.

The human race, it was said, would pass through three stages: the reign of the Father and of the law written in the Old Testament, the reign of the Son and of the faith revealed in the New Testament, the coming of the Holy Spirit in the person of St. Francis, and the reign of love announced in the book of the eternal Gospel. The ancient Church, reprobated because of its riches, would see all its rights transmitted to the mendicant religious; the empire would pass to the poor, and property would be extinguished, the world would no longer be but one great community under the Franciscan rule. These dreams did not remain confined to the depths of the cells in which they were conceived.

The eternal Gospel swept away half of the religious of the order, and after them the people who put their cause in the cause of the poor. Under the name of Fraticelli and Beghards²⁰, the sectarians soon spread throughout Italy and Germany. Their audacity went so far that they gathered at St. Peter's in Rome to appoint a pope; in 1311 the Council of Vienne, frightened by their advance, deliberated on the suppression of the order of St. Francis²¹. But when error acts against property, we know that it immediately affects the family, and never have the announcements of a gospel of love affected the Christian world without coming to the rehabilitation of the flesh by the emancipation of the

²⁰ Heavily influenced by the apocalyptic thought of Joachim of Fiore, the Fraticelli were a radical branch of the Franciscan order, spread throughout Italy and Provence, which was condemned at the beginning of the 14th century by the popes. The Beghards, who also renounced possession, received this name because of confusion with the Beguines of northern Europe.

²¹ Raynaldus, *Annales eccles. ad ann. 1294, ad ann. 1312*, Tiraboschi, t. VII (author's note).

women. While the Fraticelli preached the coming of the Holy Spirit, a foreigner named Guillelmina appeared in Milan proclaiming herself the incarnation of the Holy Spirit destined to bring to its consummation the imperfect work of Christ, to exercise a new pontificate, and to pass into the hands of women the rejuvenated scepter of the pontificate. The contemporary historians assure that she celebrated for a long time the mysteries of a nocturnal cult that ended up by awakening the jealousy of the husbands and the severity of the magistrates. The sect of Guillelmina perished, but it lasted long enough for the modern Samsonian to discover that it was not he who invented the free woman²² .

But that was not all, and the Middle Ages, the age of scholastics and tireless dialecticians, was not in the habit of enunciating a principle without carrying it to its ultimate consequences, and of applying the consequences of speculation without caring about the obstacles that might impede them in practice. In the year 1300 Christianity, already much shaken, was once more agitated by the preaching of Brother Dulcino²³ , who, going beyond the common doctrine of the Fraticelli, divided the duration of the world into four epochs, and wished to inaugurate the last by the extermination of the degenerate Church and by the establishment of a more perfect way than that of St. Dominic and St. Francis. For these two founders of orders had numerous convents to which the alms of the faithful went, and Dulcino professed not to have convents, not to keep any of the alms, but to live in the freedom of a wandering life, in the community of the primitive Church, and in familiarity with women, whom his disciples called his sisters. Thus the three vows of religious life, obedience, poverty, chastity, led to the confiscation of all powers, all goods and all pleasures. Such a doctrine, if it was to be put into practice, needed more than disciples: it needed soldiers. Dulcino, at the head of six thousand men, established himself in the mountains of Piedmont; from there he descended into the neighboring valleys, delivering the churches to the flames, the villages to pillage, the inhabitants to the edge of the sword, until the indignant populations finally united to surround the army of the sectarians, exterminate it in a final combat and send to the stake the chiefs who had escaped the slaughter²⁴ .

²² Muratori, *Antiquit. Ital., Dissert.*, t. X (author's note).

²³ See *Du Divorce*.

²⁴ Muratori, *Script, Rer. ital.*, t. IX, *Historia Dulcinoi id. ibid., additamentum ad hist. Dulcinoi* (author's note).

Such were the struggles of heterodox socialism in the thirteenth century, which never had the empire so close. Perhaps that slandered epoch, in which every heresy ended in a faction, every controversy in a war that forced society to defend itself by right and duty, will now be better judged. But we will always regret that society did not use the victory with greater moderation, and that after having quelled the revolt on the battlefields, it believed that it had to drown the opposing ideas with torture.

In the first place, contradiction can never be suppressed in the societies that God wants them to live. Contradiction is the very condition of their vigilance, of their efforts, of their duration, and we know of no power more worthy of compassion than that which meets with no resistance. Secondly, the flames of the stake have never been seen to enlighten the human spirit; on the contrary, by them it deceives itself, and there is no error in history so deviant that the human spirit is not tempted to experience, even if it sees it covered with ashes or drenched in blood. A manifest instance of this occurred when on the very threshold of modern times the enemy doctrines of property revived and caught fire in Germany fanned by the word of Muncer²⁵ and by the uprising of the Anabaptists. Nothing seems so far apart as the interests of heaven and earth. But everything is bound together in Christian society by knots so strong that its dogmas have never been shaken without breaking down to the last details of its temporal institutions.

No doubt when Luther in 1517 nailed his theses on indulgences to the door of the church of Wittenberg, he did not think that six years later he would see his disciple Muncer turn those theses into an overthrow of all political powers and all civil rights. Muncer preached the nullity of infant baptism and the necessity of rebaptizing adults; on the surface, is there anything more harmless? But in that renewed baptism he wanted men to rediscover primitive equality, to come out of the sacred fonts and re-enter the freedom of Adam, the community of Eden. He was protesting against the difference of classes and goods introduced by

²⁵ Thomas Münzer (1489-1525) was a dissident disciple of Luther who developed a millenarian theology, considered close to that of the Anabaptists. Expelled from several towns, he ended up founding a kind of theocracy in the small town of Mülhausen, in Thuringia, taking advantage of the revolt of the peasants, whom he joined. But he was quickly captured and executed.

the tyranny of the laws, called on the rich to return the treasures unjustly withheld by their fathers, and encouraged the poor to reject tribute and obedience to the magistrates, guilty of perpetuating the servitude of the Christian people. He assured that the time had come to put an end to a cursed world, and the archangel Michael inspired him to found the new kingdom of God with the sword of Gideon.

These teachings and prophecies moved the workers of Nuremberg, Swabia and Thuringia to take up arms, and in 1525 the Anabaptist peasants presented their lords with a manifesto reminiscent of the most skillful programs of the modern reformers. If they still hesitated to demand the sharing of property without compensation, they demanded the common ownership of forests and meadows, that is, of most of the land in the wooded hills, in the rich pastures of southern Germany. The fields, owned by their lords, which the peasants cultivated as renters had to be supervised by experts to lower the rent price in case it was too high. It was a case of forced rent reduction.

They finally declared their intention of obeying the magistrates only in such things as they themselves judged honorable and reasonable, which meant the insurrection of minorities and the consecration of civil war. The proposals of the Swabian peasants were supported by forty thousand spears, and Germany, which had let half of its ecclesiastical hierarchy disappear, could think for a moment of the ruin of its old feudal system. The Anabaptists, however, succumbed in two battles, and after Jean de Leyde, successor of Muncer, had expiated on the wheel the satisfaction of having realized for a brief space of time in the city of Munster the kingdom of God, his sect, dispersed, was reduced to the peaceful colonies of the Moravian brethren, who gave to Protestant Europe the honored spectacle of a peaceful life, and the instructive spectacle of their small number²⁶.

In describing over a period of fifteen hundred years the errors of socialism, we have not wished to take the paltry pleasure of humiliating it and of presenting its disciples in flagrant plagiarism. We think, on the contrary, that time, which contributes to highlight the majesty of truth, also contributes to reinforce the power of error. For a false opinion to resist the authority of anathemas for so many centuries,

²⁶ Arnold. Mestrov., *Historia anabapt.*, lib. 1., Sleidan, comment., 1, p. 128 (author's note).

to the force of laws, to the power of arms, it must be rooted in the deepest evils of human nature and most worthy of compassion. When a subject, which has always been solved by theology, philosophy, and jurisprudence, is continually reproduced and arises on the threshold of all revolutions to frighten the weak spirits and attract the strong, it is not permissible to treat it lightly, nor to believe that it has been ended by imprisoning various turbulent characters.

We must pay due respect to the great problems that Providence uses to keep societies in tension and spur them on that path of progress that will not allow them to slumber. But if in the very antiquity of error we find a motive for study, we see in it also a motive for confidence. When the doctrines which subvert the family and property, always at the gates of Christian society as if waiting for the moment to be introduced into it, have had at their service such favorable circumstances as the ruin of the Roman empire and the invasion of the barbarians, as well as the internal upheavals from the time of the Pastoureaux* to the Jacquerie**, as well as the wars of religion and the ruin of the social order throughout the north of Europe; when, sustained by so much courage, so much perseverance and so many arms, these doctrines have invariably come to fail against the solidity of civilization, we must not be frightened as if they were today a new danger.

One can reasonably count on the conscience and good sense of the peoples who have resisted these temptations for eighteen centuries. One can above all count on Christianity, which has never ceased to reject with the same firmness socialist errors and selfish passions, which contains all the truths of the modern reformers, and none of their illusions, which alone is capable of realizing the ideal of fraternity without immolating liberty, and of seeking the greatest earthly happiness of human beings without depriving them of that sacred gift of resignation, the surest remedy against pain, and the last word of a life which must come to an end.

*Popular insurgents who organized two crusades on their own in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries [Trd.]

** Popular peasant revolts of the 14th century [Trd.]