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SOCIALISM AT THE BAR OF THE CHURCH Monsignor Thomas Capel Prosecutes and the Church Decides for Plaintiff – A Brilliant Lecture

Archivist's Note: An article about Monsignor Capel was published in Volume 2, in 2014. I discovered this article in the Archives recently. There is no author or date given but it was probably published in the local Sacramento newspaper around 1910.

The Knights of Columbus opened their series of lectures last evening at Elks' hall, the



lecturer being Monsignor T.J. Capel of Arno, whose subject was "*Socialism and the Catholic Church.*" Despite the inclement weather, which was more severe than any this winter, there was an audience of 300 people to hear the eloquent and distinguished speaker, whose scholarly attainments are well known in this county of his home.

W.F. Gormley, as chairman of the entertainment committee, called to order and introduced as chairman of the evening Grand Knight James O'Gara, who in turn stated that the Knights propose to carry out a course of lectures by distinguished scholars. He sketched briefly the story of Monsignor Capel's clerical and literary prominence in Europe and referred somewhat extendedly to the famous debate in London, out of which Premier Disraeli built his novel, "Lothair," in which a chief character was painted to represent Monsignor Capel.

Mr. Ryan played a superior cornet solo and was appreciatively applauded, and the choir of St. Rose's parish, consisting of Mrs. Coppersmith, Mrs. Hawley, Mr. Cohn and Mr. Genshlea, sang a selection and received warm commendation.

The lecturer was then introduced. Bishop Grace attended with him on the rostrum, and he spoke for about an hour, and then with a smile holding his notes aloft, showed that he had but half finished, where upon the audience applauded loudly and long and cried out, "Go on, go on!" but the orator would not, saying that when at home it is his custom to go to bed at 9 p.m. and here he was dissipating by twenty minutes, for it was 9:50 p.m. He could not think of asking his hearers to extend their attention longer on such a night, but he would early return and take up the thread of his discourse anew if they pleased. The audience did please and applauded to the echo to prove it.

A synoptical sketch of the lecture cannot do it justice, but the salient points may be indicated, though the rich humor and quick wit of the venerable churchman may not be conveyed in cold type.

A syllabus of the lecture may be thus framed: The Catholic church was born in protest against the debasement and slavery of men, the vices of the rich, the misery of the proletariat of Rome, and became the doctrine of Christianity. It proved its capacity and virtue not only by breaking down the cruelties of Romans but by reducing even the invading barbarians to acknowledgment of the power of Christianity and the truth of the one God. It became the greatest champion of the world in defense of individual liberty, of the family and the rights in property, and was and is at once the church pre-eminent and the refuge of the poor and the sorrowing, as witness of its membership, its schools, its hospitals and its charities and self-sacrifice.

Before such a court he placed on trial socialism and convicted it of enmity to the right to possess property, the enemy of the family, the initial unit of the state and the basis of all civilization, and, finally, as the enemy of God, for in socialism there is no recognition of or place for God.

He began by reference to the marvelous prosperity of the time, yet in the face of it all there is another picture, with 80,000 little children toiling in the cotton mills at tender ages and many weary hours for a few cents a day to swell the gains of the rich. There has grown up –while the slums of London and New York and great cities still continue and the poor suffer bitterly – an aristocracy of wealth which is ever vulgar, and what is vulgar is dangerous always. Out of these conditions and similar phases of our system comes the threat of revolution which will surely burst upon the land, for on one side the poor will not long wait and the false teachings of socialism are poisoning the minds of the people by supplementing the anger of the poor.

The proletariat, which means those who have nothing to sell but their labor, constitute four-fifths of the people of civilization, and these are growing in unrest and anger against the trusts and the men who seek to grasp the greater wealth of the nations produced by labor.

He arraigned socialism, which is appealing to the proletariat especially, as the foe of marriage, and read from W.G. Wells, a foremost socialist, writing in *The Independent*, as saying that socialism repudiates property in private possession, it involves the personal freedom of women, it interferes between parents and children, and declares that the old family institution is incompatible with socialism, which regards the permanency of marriage no more than the claim of private ownership in property.

The lecturer defined socialism to be the doctrine that those having only labor to sell should take all property in private ownership and put it into the hands of the state, the latter to distribute and disperse it according to the needs of each individual.

That doctrine invades the natural law, the right to acquire by the sweat of one's brow and to enjoy what he acquires. The church is the champion of the natural law and therefore the foe of socialism. It is the defender of natural rights and therefore the opponent of whomsoever would

deny them. For wherever you meet civilization there you meet the right to property and the right to disburse it subject to such general laws as society finds wise for the protection of the right.

Over 700 years ago, when the great charter of liberty was wrested from royalty, it was the result of the dissemination by the church of knowledge of which liberty was born, but socialism would relegate liberty to the chains of the past.

Finally, the lecturer claimed that the family is the principal unity of civilization, that it is the relation approved by and commanded by natural law. The church defends the family relation and hence its verdict must be against socialism. In addition socialism denies religion and has no God in its calls. He read from the socialistic organ, the *Age of Reason*. In support of that statement, where, June 22, 1903, it was declared socialism is alpha and omega, that it satisfies all the natural cravings of the human heart, that the churches require over \$300,000,000 annually to guarantee entry into Heaven, but socialism tells modern man to let the gods take care of themselves, as it knows no creeds and no gods. On such authoritative declaration, what must be the judgment of the church at whose bar socialism is on trial? asked the speaker.



Photo by John E Boll

California State Capitol, Sacramento