

A Catholic View of the Economy, Excerpt from Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler's "The Worker Question and Christianity" (1864)

Abstract

An influential Catholic bishop who advocated Christian social ideas, [Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler](#) (1811–1897) applied both conservative criticism of occupational freedom and socialist economic theories in his writings. Here, he blames liberal free market economics for workers' misery, yet also expresses his reservations about guilds. His proposed remedies include charitable institutions for destitute workers, Christian family life and morals, true Christian education, and producers' cooperatives funded by wealthy Catholics.

Source

From all sides, voices are being raised to discuss the situation of the workers and to make proposals for improving their circumstances. Everywhere, societies have been formed to work "toward the improvement of the moral and economic condition of the working classes." Periodicals and treatises have appeared under titles like "Arbeiterfreund" ["Worker's Friend"], "Arbeiterkatechismus" ["Worker's Catechism"], "Arbeiterlesebuch" ["Worker's Reader"] etc., etc.

If I now undertake, as a Catholic bishop, to add my views to all these voices and proposals, if I also lay claim to the title "worker's friend," if I ask all Christian men who take the welfare of the working class to heart to please listen and consider my thoughts on this matter, then it is certainly appropriate for me to begin with a few words justifying my expression of this opinion and my purpose in doing so. Perhaps many people believe that, as a bishop, I have no justification, or at least no sufficient cause, for interfering in these sorts of things; others will say that, as a Catholic bishop, I should at most address myself to Catholics. I am of a different opinion.

I believe I have the right to offer judgment on the labor question insofar as it deals with the material needs of the Christian people. In this respect, it is also a question of Christian love. Our divine Savior bound the Christian religion, forever and indissolubly, to everything relating to the alleviation of people's spiritual and physical poverty. The Church has acted according to this precept everywhere and at all times. Practicing Christian love through works of Christian mercy has always been a prominent part of the life of the Christian Church. From this has emanated that magnificent solicitude for all types of human distress. Every question concerned with remedying that distress is therefore essentially a Christian, a religious question, in which the Church and all its living members should participate most fervently.

I am further justified in offering judgment on this matter in order to discuss the position that Christianity, with its teachings and characteristic methods, takes on this important question. Any Christian who does not wish to live thoughtlessly amidst the most important stirrings of the day must surely have sorted this out for himself. One wants to raise the "moral and economic condition of the working class" and to make certain proposals to this end. What can be more important than knowing how these proposals stand in relationship to Christianity, [knowing] whether we agree with them, may support them or not, [knowing] what special methods Christianity possesses for the moral and economic elevation of the working class? These are honest questions that are intimately connected with the Christian religion, ones that I, as a

Christian, and even as a bishop, feel called upon to judge.

[...]

It can no longer be denied that the entire material livelihood of almost the entire working class – in other words, the largest portion of humanity in modern states, the livelihood of their families, the question of daily bread for man, woman, and child – is subject to all the fluctuations of market and commodity prices. I know nothing more deplorable than this fact. What emotions must this conjure up in these poor people, who are dependent upon the contingencies of the market price for everything they need and love? This is the slave market of our liberal Europe, tailored according to the pattern of our humane, enlightened, anti-Christian liberalism and Freemasonry.

IV. THE TWO REASONS FOR THIS CONDITION

It was not always so. Rather, these conditions for the working class first arose generally in modern states. This does not mean that we are making a judgment, we are only expressing the fact that these fluctuations in the standard of living of the entire working class – it depends upon a daily wage for its entire livelihood, but this wage has become a commodity whose price is determined daily by supply and demand, almost always representing merely the worth of the barest necessities for living and often sinking below that value – were unknown in the past and only emerged with the reorganization of governmental relations since the [French] revolution [of 1789].

It is therefore also extremely important to become precisely acquainted with the reasons for these conditions, with the modern economic principles from which they arise. We can describe them with utter certainty and undeniable accuracy. To this end, we need only to remember what has just been said and to ask ourselves the question: what has turned labor into a commodity and what has pushed its value down to the lowest level of life's barest necessities?

The price of commodities is determined by supply and demand; supply and demand are oriented toward competition. But competition is raised to the highest level by removing all natural and artificial impediments, especially all barriers that hamper trade. General freedom of trade therefore opens up the greatest [level of] competition, and the greatest competition pushes down the price of commodities to the lowest limit of the most essential production costs. If commodities from all parts of the world can converge on one market, the cheapest commodities of comparable quality will carry the day and either push aside all other producers or compel them to adopt the same price. The more widespread freedom of trade is, the more widespread the applicability of this proposition, which becomes all the more inexorable with improvements in transportation and the communication of prices from one part of the world to another. The only modifying factor is the cost of transporting commodities, which forms a certain natural limit against this free trade system. But this barrier is practically abolished in turn by immeasurable improvements in the transportation of commodities.

If we apply all this to commodified labor, then we have, with utter certainty, the true reason for the stated workers' conditions. The working wage is determined by supply and demand. Supply and demand are oriented – as with any commodity, so too with labor – toward competition. The highest level of competition in supply necessarily pushes the working wage down to its lowest limits. But this is caused when all protective measures for labor have been removed. The equivalent of removing all trade barriers for the commodity is the removal of all occupational barriers for the working class. In a mathematical sense, general occupational freedom creates general competition among the workers, just as two times two equals four; and the highest level of general competition must also, as a matter of mathematics, push the working wage down to the lowest level.

There we have one reason for the condition of the working class in modern states: universal occupational freedom. It is impossible to deny this fact. Labor has become a commodity; under the most general kind

of competition, both are purchased for the lowest price by whoever makes the minimum demand. Who with a healthy mind could deny this? It is important to express this often and repeatedly, since this is the very thing concealed by the parties that are pushing themselves onto the people: both the great liberal party, which is composed mainly of Freemasonry, of the representatives of big capital, the rationalistic professoriate, and the ordinary literati who eat at the table of these esteemed gentlemen and have to write and give speeches for them daily, and which, bearing in mind their current influence among the people, has (until a new catchword becomes fashionable) taken the name of the joint company “Nationalverein” [“National Association”] and “Fortschrittspartei” [“Progressive Party”], as well as the actual radical party, which is otherwise distinguished from the great liberal party by way of a certain honest consistency. Both are united in the belief that unconditional occupational freedom is a postulate that can no longer be disputed. At this point, we are not judging if this is true; instead, we maintain that, even if occupational freedom is necessary, one should still not conceal from the people that unconditional occupational freedom immediately and necessarily leads to this condition for the entire working population. Those parties resemble a supposed friend who pushes his friend into the waters and then, standing on the shore, develops any number of possible theories about how this drowning man might be rescued, and who, by way of this benevolent activity, then claims for himself the virtues of humane conviction and moving friendship, without ever thinking that it was he himself who put his friend in this situation in the first place.

In saying this, moreover, I do not wish to come to the defense of compulsory guilds everywhere in their latest stage of development – and just as little do I wish to dismiss all efforts calling for greater occupational freedom. In order to avoid this appearance, we must take a closer look at this matter.

There is something about authority and freedom that makes them based on eternal divine ideas, [ideas] upon whose development the salvation of human beings depends; but because they [authority and freedom] are managed by human beings, they never emerge in complete purity; instead, they are always tainted by human wretchedness and abused by human selfishness. So it goes with authority; it contains a divine idea, it is a direct outflow of divine authority itself and should represent [that authority] in every circumstance in which it appears, in the highest and lowest forms. It is utterly laughable for this authority to attempt to seek a kind of surrogate in the people’s will. But authority, whose essence is so divine, is managed by human beings, and in truth this management is not always divine; it is abused in the service of egoism and can bring the affairs of human beings on earth to the brink of ruin. Then, unfailingly, the moment comes when abused freedom erupts with the inner necessity of nature. Freedom is also founded on an indestructible divine idea; but managed by human beings, it too is unspeakably abused. The form in which the abuse of freedom comes to light is disobedience, rebellion against legitimate law and legitimate authority. In Christianity this is a sin. It too can lead to utmost ruin, at which point it also elicits its opposite [authority] with a certain necessity. Thus, these two opposing forces sway on earth like a perpetually undulating ocean as long as world history goes on, and under these circumstances the people who fulfill their God-given destiny are those who strive to reconcile and unite authority and freedom, at first in their own lives, and then in the position that God has given them on the outside. These fundamental circumstances are reflected in all other human circumstances, and they also cast their light and shadow onto the questions we are dealing with here. Compulsory guild membership is a restriction on freedom, occupational freedom, so in a certain sense it represents the very kind of authority that is intended to prevent and eliminate the abuse of freedom. The idea behind compulsory guilds was to protect workers, a kind of contract between the working class and the rest of society. According to this contract, the working class provided [society] the necessary work, but society, by restricting competition, provided the workers a higher wage in order to secure their livelihood and not subject it to daily fluctuations. Whoever delivered labor to somebody else and had to stake his life on that – he had a moral right to a certain degree of security with respect to his ongoing livelihood and to the protection of not having to put his livelihood into question every day through competition. By way of natural and artificial barriers, all social classes have some kind of protection similar to this. Why should

the worker alone do without it? Why should the worker alone have to spend his entire life thinking about his work on a daily basis: I still don't know if today is the day I will get my wages, from which I and my wife and children live; maybe tomorrow a horde of hungry workers from a distant region will arrive and bid my work away from me, and I will be forced to starve with wife and child. The wealthy capitalist has enough capital to protect his business a thousand times over; freedom of trade in these regions is only a one-sided illusion. But the worker shouldn't be allowed to have any protection, and this is why guild occupations are slandered. This doesn't mean that compulsory guilds have been flawless. That authority has been abused does not have to imply that authority itself must be rejected. Thus, even compulsory guild membership, because it has not enjoyed the proper development, has been abused to a great extent. It has often served inertia and egoism, made goods excessively expensive, and deprived consumers of their rights through shoddy goods; hence it needed reshaping. But its principle was legitimate and needed to be maintained. Compulsory guild membership has the same relationship vis-à-vis occupational freedom as authority vis-à-vis freedom. It, too, has its measure of legitimacy, but also its legitimate measure of restriction. Compulsory guilds in their current state of abuse and ossified egoism have elicited the call for occupational freedom. Occupational freedom has immeasurably increased the [number of] commodities, improving them in many cases; it has lowered the excessive price of commodities, and has therefore allowed the widest circle of those classes with fewer means to experience the satisfaction of some of life's basic necessities, from which they had previously been excluded. But it, too, has its necessary limit and its established degree, and when these are exceeded, it leads to unfortunate consequences just like the abuse of compulsory guild membership.

[...]

The first kind of aid that the Church will offer the working class from now on is the establishment and management of institutions for disabled workers.

We have already observed that the great liberal party – after initially treating Christian alms with great resentment in order to give prominence to its own highly praised [social philosophy of] self-help – is now starting (after all) to include the establishment of institutions for disabled workers in the scope of its activities. But even in the future, just as before, this will remain the special domain of Christianity, the Church, and Christian charity. Almost all the funds, houses, and institutions that currently serve this end in Christian Europe owe their existence to Christianity and its spirit. Whatever humanism has accomplished in comparison is insignificant. Even now, the entire portion of the working class that has become occupationally disabled and dependent upon outside help still owes a debt of gratitude to Christianity, whose blessings it often no longer recognizes, for all the help it receives in the numerous places of refuge for the poor, in the hospitals, in the poorhouses, in the institutions for the disabled, etc. But it is not just the funds for these kinds of institutions that the Christian spirit has raised; rather, it is also their inner organization, the care that the disabled worker finds there, that Christianity alone can offer in a manner that alleviates the misery of the poor to the greatest possible extent. The helpless worker, as previously remarked, has not found true help when he is accepted by an institution; instead, what really matters is that he also gets proper care, loving treatment. I do now believe, to be sure, that humanism will succeed for a while – here and there under especially favorable circumstances, namely under the influence of outstanding individual personalities, and for as long as they live – in bringing similar institutions to a certain level of inner organization. Competition with Christian institutions will even force humanism to do its utmost and [will] compel it to create a few model institutions that might have greater luster and therefore harbor the illusion of holding their own alongside the former. By and large, though, none of the parties who are now trying to help the world without the supernatural forces and gifts that God has inscribed into Christianity will ever succeed in offering workers who have become unemployed and been accepted at one of the numerous places of refuge the same kind of treatment and care that Christianity is capable of providing. The inner organization and direction of hospitals and poorhouses is something infinitely difficult. With age, the disabled worker becomes more and more

helpless and needy. He becomes weak in body and spirit. The failings and passions, the evil habits of his younger days come more and more to light. The inclination toward uncleanness, often to an appalling extent, listlessness, alcoholism, quarrelsomeness, etc., all meet there. There is perhaps no place in which all the wretchedness of human nature converges as it does in these institutions. Whoever wants to endure there and triumph over all this spiritual and physical infirmity through force of loving care needs to arrive with a heart filled with more than just human and earthly love. Where this is not the case, even the best and most benevolent wardens will gradually tire when faced with so many bad ones, they will become accustomed to the misery of these people and soon run the risk of acting in a way that frequently violates the laws of higher charity. Insofar as I have been given the opportunity in my life to become acquainted with similar institutions, I have become convinced that – in spite of all the humanitarian principles that are abundantly articulated by the supervising officials – most of the institutions under purely worldly care have major handicaps in their inner organization and that many of them exist in a state of neglect, in which filth, sluggishness, and dissoluteness rule on the one hand, while a dulled indifference toward all of this misery prevails on the other. Having daily contact with poor sick patients and poor invalids and caring for them all year long is such an arduous business that human nature, left to its own resources, is not up to the task. Even the love of parents and children frequently succumbs to this burden when longstanding illnesses and elderly infirmities exist. In much the same way, some aged fathers are treated unlovingly by their children because the children's feelings have been more or less dulled by the long duration of the misery! How should the kind of care for which even the love of children often no longer suffices be practiced by people who dedicate themselves to this business simply for the sake of their wages? Only the supernatural love that Christ pours into human hearts can confer the power to give the poor in such refuges of human misery the [kind of] care that is lasting and loving enough to be what they actually need. [...]

The second kind of aid that the Church offers the working class, in order to provide remedies for its material distress as well, is the Christian family along with its foundation, Christian marriage. The Christian family provides the working class with three essential advantages that are also of profound importance for its economic circumstances.

One danger that threatens the working class is the dissolution of all truly organic ties that protect and guard its individual life. We need only recall the first group of relief measures proposed by the liberal party. How far this dissolution will proceed in the future is something we cannot estimate. Even the family is not supposed to be excluded from it. Among these measures, we also find the principle that marriage should be freed of all obstacles whatsoever. We do not wish to deny that, in some regions, getting married has become excessively difficult; on the other hand, a certain degree of restriction is legitimate, well-founded in reason as in Christianity, and abolishing all restrictions can only promote recklessness in entering into matrimony and thereby damage the family. Also relevant here is the effort to view marriage as a purely civil institution, to introduce civil marriage. The strength of the family resides absolutely in religion and in the Christian doctrine of marriage. It is, above all, the view of the Catholic Church – that marriage is a sacrament, and that the bond of marriage can be dissolved only by death – that provides the unshakeable foundation of its strength. If marriage is viewed merely as a civil institution, and if this view were to permeate a people, then Christian marriage would be finished. The marriage tie would soon appear as a civil contract that one could then abolish at will through mutual consent, and the number of grounds for civil divorce would then increase indefinitely. But this goal will encounter a triumphant opposition from the Church and Christianity, in conjunction with the conscience of the Christian people, and it will not succeed – neither by way of civil marriage, nor by promoting rash marriage unions, nor by facilitating divorce – in destroying this God-given organism [Gen 1:27 ff.; 2:18-24] whose power to bestow blessings on all members of the family is immense.

Another danger for the working class is the influence that poor living conditions exert on the health and lifespan of people. Initially, this is a consequence of poor diet, bad air, and a miserable way of life. But

diet, air, and housing are not the only things that determine the physical well-being of human beings; rather, another component exercises a far greater influence, namely the chaste morals of a people. This disseminates its physical influence down to the most recent generations. If we come across a people whose diet is barely sufficient but whose health is flourishing, then the primary reason is chaste, pure morals. If dissoluteness and immorality are added to poor diet, to unhealthy air in miserable housing, then a people is on its way to utmost ruin. Over the long run, the most noble tribe of people cannot withstand the combination of these factors. Herein lies the main reason for the profound debasement of the slaves in ancient heathen times, and the crude morality of these poor people was a major reason for their masters to treat them like animals. It is completely unfounded to assume that any people is protected from such conditions by its nature, and this view fundamentally rests (once again) on the heathen notion that nature itself distinguishes human beings [from one another], intending some for prosperity and higher spiritual culture, but others for slavery and an animal existence. Together, poverty and dissoluteness can reproduce the most debased conditions of heathendom; numerous examples of this can be found in every one of Europe's major cities. But these factors, which ruin human beings, would make their impact felt to the highest extent throughout the more impoverished part of the working class if the prospect of destroying family and marriage for the worker should succeed. As a result of other economic principles, a major portion of the working class has already been pushed down to the lowest level of life's barest necessities; but by dissolving the Christian family, the murderous poison of sexual indecency, with all of its atrocious effects, would be poured into the heart [of the working class]. There is, as we can see every day, such an impure spirit abroad in the world. How many newspapers serve this spirit, naturally to the extent appropriate for a people that is still essentially Christian. Demoralizing pleasures are daily offered the people, yes, and in the organs of the liberal party they are even extolled before the people as the highest and truest of life's pleasures. The stories they convey are frequently glorifications of immorality and all those moral transgressions that play a special role in destroying Christian marriage and the Christian family. From the theater in the big cities, where spiritual and intellectual self-improvement is supposedly cultivated, and the elegant novels that are written for these classes, all the way down to the smallest popular newspapers that are distributed and sold door-to-door, it is frequently frivolity, sensuality, and even adultery that gets portrayed in countless twists and turns and depictions. For this very reason, on the other hand, the Christian Church is an object of hate, because it is obligated by its Christian dictates to fight against immorality. And, therefore, whenever any person practicing religion becomes guilty of a moral transgression, this is used by the immoral press with derisive joy as a weapon against religion. It triumphantly proclaims every slip like this and thereby robs the people and the world more and more of faith in a truly higher morality and chastity in life. The advertisements of many papers offer a kind of chronicle of daily dissoluteness and give the people the most detailed knowledge of all the hidden pathways upon which this vice creeps along. In England, this tendency has already reached such a height that papers that exclusively portray this wretched side of human life in stories and novels, and that publicly conduct a kind of marriage brokerage for the people, the workers, and the serving class, are sold in hundreds of thousands of copies. I do not doubt that these conditions among the working population in England have substantially contributed to reducing life expectancy in some classes and regions to an average age of fifteen years. What else might we expect if, under conditions like these, unconditional freedom to conclude and dissolve marriages were to be introduced, and civil marriage in the spirit of Enlightenment-mongering were simultaneously to gain domination over the people! It is in the nature of things that workers frequently get together in large masses; they live together in huge crowds in workers' houses; the two sexes are also all mixed up on these occasions. What would become of all these workers if Christianity could no longer assert its doctrine on purity, on chastity, on sin, and if, at every enticing opportunity and danger, one called out to the mass of people: There is no longer any firm marriage bond, you may marry and separate as you please! Sexual indecency is a danger that confronts people early on and that frequently exerts its most dreadful influence at an early age, so that it evades almost any kind of preventive supervision. Only the heart of a Christian mother or father equipped with all the refinement of feeling that Christianity provides is capable of joining forces with those resources that religion offers to protect the tender human

plant from this blight and to raise a family that is pure and chaste. Marriages rashly concluded and dissolved cannot even come close to providing this kind of protection to the poor child helplessly exposed to these dangers. What would ultimately become of all the workers' children from rashly concluded and rashly dissolved marriage alliances like these, daily exposed to all the dangers of seduction and poor example? Physically dependent upon the most miserable makeshift assistance, without loving parental care and parental supervision, they would look for compensation for their miserable earthly existence in sexual indecency and would fall all the more quickly and surely into spiritual and physical ruin. Conditions like these are no figment of the imagination; rather, they are already developing everywhere in certain situations in which modern principles have penetrated the working masses and started to damage the purity of marriage and family life. One cannot help but think with profound melancholy about how this tendency is penetrating deeper into our German working class. The power of Christianity will prevent this, as will God, who stands by His Church omnipotently. Christian marriage with its elevated idea of indissolubility and holiness will oppose this poison in the human race with triumphant resistance. The Church will save marriage for the working class, and [it will save] the Christian family and the Christian heart of mothers and fathers for workers' children. This is but the first and most essential condition for solving the worker's question. As long as our workers still have the Christian family, the husband a Christian wife, the wife a Christian husband, the children Christian parents, the parents good Christian children who still know the Fourth Commandment [Ex. 20:12], as long as this is the case, the ruination of the working class faces a firm barrier that it can never cross.

[...]

The third kind of aid that Christianity gives to the working class is its truths and teachings, which also afford the working class true education. If the liberal party promises the working class higher training from the liberals' doctrine of self-help and worker education associations, then this is, to the extent that the teaching methods of Christianity are being disregarded, empty semblance and vain illusion. Only Christianity offers the working class true education. Just as a bread crumb fallen to the ground compares with a rich man's table, so do all the teaching methods of a rationalistic worldview compare with those of Christianity [Lk 16: 21]. They do not know Christianity, with its immense healing powers, and if they, so to speak, find some of the crumbs that have fallen from Christianity, they praise them to the world as if they had found a new, unknown remedy, while what they have is just a small, atrophied bit of what Christianity has to offer people.

[...]

Finally, in its training, Christianity provides the working class those same virtues that are also so necessary for its material livelihood and that also contribute to increasing and sweetening, so to speak, its miserable daily wage; it gives it inner joyfulness of heart and an inner peace that eases work; it guides it toward moderation, thrift, and abstinence, which increase prosperity; it provides it with familial joys that make the tavern dispensable; it protects it from the influence of evil passions and thereby keeps it healthy and powerful, so that its work becomes even easier.

Thus, Christianity provides the worker with the true means for self-help, by guiding the whole human personality toward developing all his powers, and it provides him with true education by proclaiming the only truths and virtues that are capable of educating.

The fourth kind of aid that Christianity offers toward improving the material situation of the working class lies in the social forces themselves.

[...]

What we have in mind here, first of all, is the enterprise of the craftsmen's association, which came into

being a number of years ago, and which is trying to reunify the class of craftsmen into a coherent cooperative. The idea that forms the basis for this attempt is certainly a deeply justifiable one that will offer a solution. We wish with all our hearts that the attempt now being made will produce results. If the governments – not in the service of the liberal party, from whom I expect nothing good in any area, but rather acting independently and with expertise – were to provide the craftsmen's class with an order in which it could again move toward the independence it needs and toward a vigorous cooperative, then we would regard this as a supremely far-reaching and beneficial measure whose results could hardly be determined in advance. It almost seems that we would have to dispense, once and for all, with [counting on] today's governments [to engage in any kind of] constructive activity. But this makes it even more important for all creative and productive Christian forces to support, as much as they can, the effort to restore social standing to the rank of the craftsmen's class.

The second enterprise we need to mention at this juncture are the associations of journeymen. They have chiefly arisen in Catholic regions, so we have every right to call them a Catholic contribution to the solution of the labor question. Even their results so far have surpassed all expectations, and they also show us what can become of these journeymen's associations when their entire development is brought to a full conclusion. God availed himself of a journeyman in order to take on this work, and after he raised him to the rank of the priests, he made the Reverend Mr. Kolping, this old journeyman, into a true father of this class of journeymen. May God henceforth use him as an instrument for solidifying this work. This will happen more and more if the cooperative principle, supported by the spirit of Christianity, develops ever more in these associations and makes All of them into living members of one body.

As the fifth kind of aid whereby Christianity can help the working class, finally, we draw attention to the promotion of Productive Associations [*Produktiv-Associationen*] through special resources that are only at the disposal of Christianity.

The essence of Productive Associations is something we have recognized ourselves when workers take part in operating a business. In these [Associations], the worker is simultaneously both business entrepreneur and worker, and therefore has a dual share in the income: his worker's wage and his share of actual business profits.

It is not necessary here to further explain the Productive Associations' great value for improving the situation of the working class. We do not know if anyone will ever succeed in offering the advantages of these cooperatives to all workers, or even just the major share of them. But they [the cooperatives] harbor a magnificent idea that deserves our utmost sympathy and support. It [this idea] provides, to the extent that it is practicable, the most immediate and most obvious solution to the problem at hand, since – apart from what the worker gets now, a working wage depressed to the lowest level by the market price – it offers the worker yet another source of income. LASSALLE wants to implement this plan with advance capital payments from the public treasury. We have expressed the view that this assistance – as a general principle, at least, i.e., as a compulsory obligation for the prosperous classes, in the manner of a tax raised from their assets, in order to give the working class the necessary capital – must be regarded as an intrusion into property rights and an overstepping of the lawful limits of the state's taxation rights, and that additionally we also doubt that this would result in a peaceful, orderly, governmental development. [...]

As often as I have reflected on these conditions and difficulties, just as often have I been revived by the confidence and the joyous hope that the forces within Christianity that set hearts in motion will come to the aid of the working class, and that the idea of Productive Associations will be realized to a greater extent. This will require large amounts of capital, and far be it from me to think that this assistance for the working class will be suddenly realized everywhere and all at once; but I am looking at this development from afar and hoping that Christian souls will soon set about [raising] its foundations, now here, now there. In all its undertakings, Christianity is a force that affects things from the inside, forges

ahead slowly, but then also unfailingly accomplishes the most sublime and unexpected things on behalf of human salvation. It may still be a long time before the effects of Christianity become as extensive as they need to be. The spirit of Christianity also worked for centuries before the grand old Roman families released their slaves by the thousands and gave them freedom. Perhaps some SCHULZE-DELITZSCH^[1] will appear on the scene and proclaim rescue and salvation for the working class until the tower that the last of them has built up collapses, and then convey to the poor working folk the new, tragic knowledge that it has been deceived and that its hopes were in vain. Perhaps the world will even have to attempt the LASSALLEAN program in practice and – after all the sorrows that might result from this dangerous maneuver, namely, if it should be surrendered into the hands of evil demagogues – experience for itself that even the democrats are incapable of helping it if they build their philanthropic ideas on mere drift sand instead of the rock of Christianity. We cannot know, therefore, how and when Christianity will also help the working class in this fashion. On the other hand, we do not doubt that whatever is truthful and good and practicable in the idea of Productive Associations will be accomplished by Christianity. At this moment, admittedly, the class that could achieve great things, the class of rich merchants, wealthy industry, and major capitalists, is rather far removed from Christianity; it now constitutes, above all, the moving, paying, remunerating power behind the major liberal party. Yet here, too, Christianity still has its true adherents, and what is lacking in others need not always need remain so. There was a time when even the old, wealthy Roman patrician families – in which the Roman matron was served by hundreds of slave girls just in washing her body – were very far removed from Christianity, and yet there came a time when the children of these families released the slaves, used their wealth to cover Italy with charitable institutions for the poor slaves, and even gave up their lives for the love of Christ. Christianity is so wonderful! Whoever is its enemy today falls down adoringly on his knees in front of the Cross tomorrow, and the son of man who had cursed Christ sacrifices his blood out of love of Christ. Yet be that as it may; Christianity is so abundant in resources that, when it is God's will to direct the hearts of Christians toward this realm, it will not prove difficult, little by little, to amass even the large amounts of capital that might be necessary to create Productive Associations. There are two systems of taxation, one exercised by the state, the other by Christianity. The state taxes by external obligation according to tax laws, tax lists, and tax collector; Christianity taxes according to the law of love, and the tax obligation and tax rate and tax collector there are free will and conscience. All the great states of Europe proceed to ruin with their tax systems, and from these monetary predicaments there has emerged that secret of harshness and corruption, that globe-encompassing web of stock market speculation, with all the corruption that emerges from this swamp. Christianity's taxation system, by contrast, has always found the richest profusion of all imaginable resources for all of its great enterprises. What sums of capital has Christianity already amassed, through its voluntary taxation, in the conscience and the heart of good Christians? If we were to think about all these churches, all these monasteries, all these institutions of Christian love for every conceivable human distress and infirmity, all the parishes and bishoprics all over the world, all the poor people's funds collected all over the world, all the schools and learning institutions founded by Christianity, all these old university funds, and if we were to realize that almost all of these things without exception were created and founded by voluntary donations, then what conception would we then need to entertain about the vitality of Christianity? And it is not the case that Christianity was like this only in ancient times, it is entirely like this even today. If we were to add up all the charitable institutions that have been created by voluntary donations over the course of our lifetime, what would be the resulting sum? Over the last five years, after all, this voluntary taxation of the Christian spirit served up twenty-three million just for the Holy Father. Let our adversaries think what they will about the how these donations are put to use; they must at least concede that a Church that brings such a reality to light possesses a corresponding inner power that they lack. How should Christianity be deprived of those resources for creating the institutions needed by the working class?

[...]

May God in His mercy therefore awaken those men who will seize the fruitful idea of Productive

Associations in the name of God, on the basis of Christianity, and for the salvation of the working class. A large portion of workers in the largest factory districts is now in the hands of unbelieving men and depend upon them for their wages; their livelihood is doubly endangered. Not only are they reliant upon their daily wages, which can be taken away from them any day, for their most basic human needs; they are also in danger of having their factory masters buy their faith and conscience from them. This is what is so sad and disgraceful about this new latter-day slavery. Many rich factory masters use the influence over these poor people that comes from their dependence to tear their Christian faith from their souls. I am thus saying that they have to serve them; if one replies to me that the factory worker is working voluntarily, I reply that this voluntariness is an illusion. Here, it is the same with competition and this whole liberal economic system, it is all appearance and [in] contradiction with reality. The poor worker lives in his homeland, close to business. One tells him there is freedom of movement, you can go elsewhere in search of your bread. But how can this man journey forth with wife and family in order to try this! He cannot dispense with his daily wage for a single day without going hungry; how can he – on the off chance of finding work – go traveling about for weeks on end, not only dispensing with his wage, but also incurring travel expenses! He would be heading toward begging and death by hunger; for him there is no freedom of movement, because he cannot make use of it; he is bound to the place of his homeland by natural laws. Furthermore, the liberal party says to him: there is occupational freedom, to pick another trade in the whole wide world, you don't need to make do with the daily wages doled out by the factory master; if you do that, that's your business. But, again, this is all untrue. The poor worker of whom we speak is a family father; he has spent the first and ten best years of his youth in the factory; there, he has already expended the best part of his health; and division of labor in the factory means that he knows nothing but one small mechanical task, one single part of a larger process that has no value of its own whatsoever. His factory lifespan is perhaps forty years at most, and now he's already starting to become sickly, and at the same time he now has the most needs. The liberal party can say as much as it wants about occupational freedom: if he does not want to go hungry, both he and his family are dependent upon this specific place and this specific business; he must work for this rich factory master, and this "must" is just as compelling for him as for any slave who is taught this "must" with whips and chains. Thus, countless workers in the factory districts – and the distress of these poor people, who are so dependent upon the will of their factory master and have a profound awareness of this dependency – are still abused so often, while at the same time the rhetoric of humanity and tolerance overflows, ruining them religiously and morally. Who is not acquainted with such factory masters, whose great workhouses are nothing more than institutions where our poor, poor Christian people, namely our Christian youth, learns dissolution, mockery of religion, and every kind of bad passion? What kind of an impact would there be if one could begin – in these modern slave districts of white slavery, where the poor Christian people is abused by un-Christian factory masters – to establish Productive Associations on a Christian foundation? If Christian love could amass the means necessary for a business establishment and summon the workers to work for this business on the condition that a portion of the profits (that portion not needed for the operation of the business or for reserve funds) would flow to them as property out of Christian love? The success would be great, and the cursed influence of an industry that has fallen away from God on our working class might thereby be broken for good. May the attention of all Christian thinkers who are driven by the Christian spirit to reflect upon the distress of the working class and on the means to help them turn toward this matter at hand; may God arouse the people to acquire the insight and means to work toward this goal. If one were to begin with those branches of industry that do not require very significant sums of capital, then this might not be quite so hard to implement. In our time, there are also classes that are driven to achieve good for their fellow human beings. In earlier times, the nobility gave a portion of the great monastic foundations as an offering to the Church. It seems to me that there could hardly be anything more Christian and pleasing to God than for a cooperation to convene in order to work for this purpose at a place where the distress of the workers is especially great, and to establish this kind of Productive Association for workers on a Christian foundation.

NOTES

[1] Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch was the founder of a liberal, market-oriented cooperative and trade union movement in Germany – trans.

Source: Wilhelm Emmanuel Baron von Ketteler, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Erwin Iserloh. Mainz: von Hase & Koehler Verlag, 1977–, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 368–70, 380–85, 432–33, 435–38, 439, 444, 448–50, 451–53, 454–55.

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Recommended Citation: A Catholic View of the Economy, Excerpt from Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler's "The Worker Question and Christianity" (1864), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/from-vormaerz-to-prussian-dominance-1815-1866/ghdi:document-471>> [May 06, 2024].