

"Our Apostolic Mandate (Notre Charge Apostolique)

Letter from Pius X, bishop of Rome to the French Bishops

August 15, 1910

Our Apostolic Mandate requires from Us that We watch over the purity of the Faith and the integrity of Catholic discipline. It requires from Us that We protect the faithful from evil and error; especially so when evil and error are presented in dynamic language which, concealing vague notions and ambiguous expressions with emotional and high-sounding words, is likely to set ablaze the hearts of men in pursuit of ideals which, whilst attractive, are nonetheless nefarious. Such were not so long ago the doctrines of the so-called philosophers of the 18th century, the doctrines of the Revolution and Liberalism which have been so often condemned; such are even today the theories of the Sillon which, under the glowing appearance of generosity, are all too often wanting in clarity, logic and truth. These theories do not belong to the Catholic or, for that matter, to the French Spirit.

We have long debated, Venerable Brethren, before We decided to solemnly and publicly speak Our mind on the Sillon.¹ Only when your concern augmented Our own did We decide to do so. For We love, indeed, the valiant young people who fight under the Sillon's banner, and We deem them worthy of praise and admiration in many respects. We love their leaders, whom We are pleased to acknowledge as noble souls on a level above vulgar passions, and inspired with the noblest form of enthusiasm in their quest for goodness. You have seen, Venerable Brethren, how, imbued with a living realization of the brotherhood of men, and supported in their selfless efforts by their love of Jesus Christ and a strict observance of their religious duties, they sought out those who labour and suffer in order to set them on their feet again.

This was shortly after Our Predecessor Leo XIII of happy memory had issued his remarkable Encyclical on the condition of the working class. Speaking through her supreme leader, the Church had just poured out of the tenderness of her motherly love over the humble and the lowly, and it looked as though she was calling out for an ever growing number of people to labour for the restoration of order and justice in our uneasy society. Was it not opportune, then, for the leaders of the Sillon to come forward and place at the service of the Church their troops of young believers who could fulfil her wishes and her hopes? And, in fact, the Sillon did raise among the workers the standard of Jesus Christ, the symbol of salvation for peoples

¹ Progressive French Catholic movement in 19th century.

and nations. Nourishing its social action at the fountain of divine grace, it did impose a respect for religion upon the least willing groups, accustoming the ignorant and the impious to hearing the Word of God. And, not seldom, during public debates, stung by a question, or sarcasm, you saw them jumping to their feet and proudly proclaiming their faith in the face of a hostile audience. This was the heyday of the Sillon; its brighter side accounts for the encouragement, and tokens of approval, which the bishops and the Holy See gave liberally when this religious fervour was still obscuring the true nature of the Sillonist movement.

For it must be said, Venerable Brethren, that our expectations have been frustrated in large measure. The day came when perceptive observers could discern alarming trends within the Sillon; the Sillon was losing its way. Could it have been otherwise? Its leaders were young, full of enthusiasm and self-confidence. But they were not adequately equipped with historical knowledge, sound philosophy, and solid theology to tackle without danger the difficult social problems in which their work and their inclinations were involving them. They were not sufficiently equipped to be on their guard against the penetration of liberal and Protestant concepts on doctrine and obedience.

They were given no small measure of advice. Admonition came after the advice but, to Our sorrow, both advice and reproaches ran off the sheath of their elusive souls, and were of no avail. Things came to such a pass that We should be failing in Our duty if kept silence any longer. We owe the truth to Our dear sons of the Sillon who are carried away by their generous ardour along the path strewn with errors and dangers. We owe the truth to a large number of seminarians and priests who have been drawn away by the Sillon, if not from the authority, at least from the guidance and influence of the bishops. We owe it also to the Church in which the Sillon is sowing discord and whose interests it endangers.

In the first place We must take up sharply the pretension of the Sillon to escape the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical authority. Indeed, the leaders of the Sillon claim that they are working in a field which is not that of the Church; they claim that they are pursuing aims in the temporal order only and not those of the spiritual order; that the Sillonist is simply a Catholic devoted to the betterment of the working class and to democratic endeavours by drawing from the practice of his faith the energy for his selfless efforts. They claim that, neither more nor less than a Catholic craftsman, farmer, economist or politician, the Sillonist is subject to common standards of behaviour, yet without being bound in a special manner by the authority of the Church.

To reply to these fallacies is only too easy; for whom will they make believe that the Catholic Sillonists, the priests and seminarians enrolled in their ranks have in sight in their social work, only the temporal interests of the working class? To maintain this, We think, would be an

insult to them. The truth is that the Sillonist leaders are self-confessed and irrepressible idealists; they claim to regenerate the working class by first elevating the conscience of Man; they have a social doctrine, and they have religious and philosophical principles for the reconstruction of society upon new foundations; they have a particular conception of human dignity, freedom, justice and brotherhood; and, in an attempt to justify their social dreams, they put forward the Gospel, but interpreted in their own way; and what is even more serious, they call to witness Christ, but a diminished and distorted Christ. Further, they teach these ideas in their study groups, and inculcate them upon their friends, and they also introduce them into their working procedures. Therefore they are really professors of social, civic, and religious morals; and whatever modifications they may introduce in the organization of the Sillonist movement, we have the right to say that the aims of the Sillon, its character and its action belong to the field of morals which is the proper domain of the Church. In view of all this, the Sillonist are deceiving themselves when they believe that they are working in a field that lies outside the limits of Church authority and of its doctrinal and directive power.

Even if their doctrines were free from errors, it would still be a very serious breach of Catholic discipline to decline obstinately the direction of those who have received from heaven the mission to guide individuals and communities along the straight path of truth and goodness. But, as We have already said, the evil lies far deeper; the Sillon, carried away by an ill-conceived love for the weak, has fallen into error.

Indeed, the Sillon proposes to rise up and re-educate the working class. But in this respect the principles of Catholic doctrine have been defined, and the history of Christian civilization bears witness to their beneficent fruitfulness. Our Predecessor of happy memory re-affirmed them in masterly documents, and all Catholics dealing with social questions have the duty to study them and to keep them in mind. He taught, among other things, that "Christian Democracy must preserve the diversity of classes which is assuredly the attribute of a soundly constituted State, and it must seek to give human society the form and character which God, its Author, has imparted to it." Our Predecessor denounced "A certain Democracy which goes so far in wickedness as to place sovereignty in the people and aims at the suppression of classes and their levelling down." At the same time, Leo XIII laid down for Catholics a program of action, the only program capable of putting society back onto its centuries' old Christian basis. But what have the leaders of the Sillon done? Not only have they adopted a program and teaching different from that of Leo XIII (which would be of itself a singularly audacious decision on the part of laymen thus taking up, concurrent with the Sovereign Pontiff, the role of director of social action in the Church); but they have openly rejected the program laid out by Leo XIII, and have adopted another which is diametrically opposed to it. Further, they reject the doctrine recalled by Leo XIII on the essential principles of society; they place authority in the people, or gradually suppress it and strive, as their ideal, to effect the levelling down of the classes. In opposition to Catholic doctrine, therefore, they are proceeding towards a condemned ideal.

We know well that they flatter themselves with the idea of raising human dignity and the discredited condition of the working class. We know that they wish to render just and perfect the labour laws and the relations between employers and employees, thus causing a more complete justice and a greater measure of charity to prevail upon earth, and causing also a profound and fruitful transformation in society by which mankind would make an undreamed-of progress. Certainly, We do not blame these efforts; they would be excellent in every respect if the Sillonist did not forget that a person's progress consists in developing his natural abilities by fresh motivations; that it consists also in permitting these motivations to operate within the frame of, and in conformity with, the laws of human nature. But, on the contrary, by ignoring the laws governing human nature and by breaking the bounds within which they operate, the human person is led, not toward progress, but towards death. This, nevertheless, is what they want to do with human society; they dream of changing its natural and traditional foundations; they dream of a Future City built on different principles, and they dare to proclaim these more fruitful and more beneficial than the principles upon which the present Christian City rests.

No, Venerable Brethren, We must repeat with the utmost energy in these times of social and intellectual anarchy when everyone takes it upon himself to teach as a teacher and lawmaker - the City cannot be built otherwise than as God has built it; society cannot be setup unless the Church lays the foundations and supervises the work; no, civilization is not something yet to be found, nor is the New City to be built on hazy notions; it has been in existence and still is: it is Christian civilization, it is the Catholic City. It has only to be set up and restored continually against the unremitting attacks of insane dreamers, rebels and miscreants. OMNIA INSTAURARE IN CHRISTO.

Now, lest We be accused of judging too hastily and with unjustified rigor the social doctrines of the Sillon, We wish to examine their essential points.

The Sillon has a praise-worthy concern for human dignity, but it understands human dignity in the manner of some philosophers, of whom the Church does not at all feel proud. The first condition of that dignity is liberty, but viewed in the sense that, except in religious matters, each man is autonomous. This is the basis principle from which the Sillon draws further conclusions: today the people are in tutelage under an authority distinct from themselves; they must liberate themselves: political emancipation. They are also dependent upon employers who own the means of production, exploit, oppress and degrade the workers; they must shake off the yoke: economic emancipation. Finally, they are ruled by a caste preponderance in the direction of affairs. The people must break away from this dominion: intellectual emancipation. The levelling-down of differences from this three-fold point of view will bring about equality among men, and such equality is viewed as true human justice. A socio-political set-up resting on these two pillars of Liberty and Equality (to which Fraternity will presently be added), is what they call Democracy.

However, liberty and equality are, so to speak, no more than a negative side. The distinctive and positive aspect of Democracy is to be found in the largest possible participation of everyone in the government of public affairs. And this, in turn, comprises a three-fold aspect, namely political, economical, and moral.

At first, the Sillon does not wish to abolish political authority; on the contrary, it considers it necessary; but it wishes to divide it, or rather to multiply it in such a way that each citizen will become a kind of king. Authority, so they concede, comes from God, but it resides primarily in the people and expresses itself by means of elections or, better still, by selection. However, it still remains in the hands of the people; it does not escape their control. It will be an external authority, yet only in appearance; in fact, it will be internal because it will be an authority assented to.

All other things being equal, the same principle will apply to economics. Taken away from a specific group, management will be so well multiplied that each worker will himself become a kind of employer. The system by which the Sillon intends to actualize this economic ideal is not Sillonism, they say; it is a system of guilds in a number large enough to induce a healthy competition and to protect the workers' independence; in this manner, they will not be bound to any guild in particular.

We come now to the principal aspect, the moral aspect. Since, as we have seen, authority is much reduced, another force is necessary to supplement it and to provide a permanent counterweight against individual selfishness. This new principle, this force, is the love of professional interest and of public interest, that is to say, the love of the very end of the profession and of society. Visualize a society in which, in the soul of everyone, along with the innate love of personal interest and family welfare, prevails love for one's occupation and for the welfare of the community. Imagine this society in which, in the conscience of everyone, personal and family interests are so subordinate that a superior interest always takes precedence over them. Could not such a society almost do without any authority? And would it not be the embodiment of the ideal of human dignity, with each citizen having the soul of a king, and each worker the soul of a master? Snatched away from the pettiness of private interests, and raised up to the interests of the profession and, even higher, to those of the whole nation and, higher still, to those of the whole human race (for the Sillon's field of vision is not bound by the national borders, it encompasses all men even to the ends of the earth), the human heart, enlarged by the love of the common-wealth, would embrace all comrades of the same profession, all compatriots, all men. Such is the ideal of human greatness and nobility to be attained through the famous popular trilogy: **LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY.**

These three elements, namely political, economic, and moral, are inter-dependent and, as We have said, the moral element is dominant. Indeed, no political Democracy can survive if it is not anchored to an economic Democracy. But neither one nor the other is possible if it is not rooted in awareness by the human conscience of being invested with moral responsibilities and energies mutually commensurate. But granted the existence of that awareness, so created by conscious responsibilities and moral forces, the kind of Democracy arising from it will naturally reflect in deeds the consciousness and moral forces from which it flows. In the same manner, political Democracy will also issue from the trade-guild system. Thus, both political and economic Democracies, the latter bearing the former, will be fastened in the very consciousness of the people to unshakable bases.

To sum up, such is the theory, one could say the dream of the Sillon; and that is what its teaching aims at, what it calls the democratic education of the people, that is, raising to its maximum the conscience and civic responsibility of everyone, from which will result economic and political Democracy and the reign of **JUSTICE, LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY.**

This brief explanation, Venerable Brethren, will show you clearly how much reason We have to say that the Sillon opposes doctrine to doctrine, that it seeks to build its City on a theory contrary to Catholic truth, and that falsifies the basis and essential notions which regulate social relations in any human society. The following considerations will make this opposition even more evident.

The Sillon places public authority primarily in the people, from whom it then flows into the government in such a manner, however, that it continues to reside in the people. But Leo XIII absolutely condemned this doctrine in his Encyclical “*Diuturnum Illud*” on political government in which he said:

“Modern writers in great numbers, following in the footsteps of those who called themselves philosophers in the last century, declare that all power comes from the people; consequently those who exercise power in society do not exercise it from their own authority, but from an authority delegated to them by the people and on the condition that it can be revoked by the will of the people from whom they hold it. Quite contrary is the sentiment of Catholics who hold that the right of government derives from God as its natural and necessary principle.”

Admittedly, the Sillon holds that authority - which first places in the people - descends from God, but in such a way: “as to return from below upwards, whilst in the organization of the Church power descends from above downwards.”

But besides its being abnormal for the delegation of power to ascend, since it is in its nature to descend, Leo XIII refuted in advance this attempt to reconcile Catholic Doctrine with the error of philosophism. For, he continues: “It is necessary to remark here that those who preside over the government of public affairs may indeed, in certain cases, be chosen by the will and judgment of the multitude without repugnance or opposition to Catholic doctrine. But whilst this choice marks out the ruler, it does not confer upon him the authority to govern; it does not delegate the power, it designates the person who will be invested with it.”

For the rest, if the people remain the holders of power, what becomes of authority? A shadow, a myth; there is no more law properly so-called, no more obedience. The Sillon acknowledges this: indeed, since it demands that threefold political, economic, and intellectual emancipation in the name of human dignity, the Future City in the formation of which it is engaged will have no masters and no servants. All citizens will be free; all comrades, all kings. A command, a precept would be viewed as an attack upon their freedom; subordination to any form of superiority would be a diminishment of the human person, and obedience a disgrace. Is it in this manner, Venerable Brethren, that the traditional doctrine of the Church represents social relations, even in the most perfect society? Has not every community of people, dependent and unequal by nature, need of an authority to direct their activity towards the common good and to enforce its laws? And if perverse individuals are to be found in a community (and there always are), should not authority be all the stronger as the selfishness of the wicked is more threatening? Further, - unless one greatly deceives oneself in the conception of liberty - can it be said with an atom of reason that authority and liberty are incompatible? Can one teach that obedience is contrary to human dignity and that the ideal would be to replace it by “accepted authority”? Did not St. Paul the Apostle foresee human society in all its possible stages of development when he bade the faithful to be subject to every authority? Does obedience to men as the legitimate representatives of God, that is to say in the final analysis, obedience to God, degrade Man and reduce him to a level unworthy of himself? Is the religious life which is based on obedience, contrary to the ideal of human nature? Were the Saints - the most obedient men, just slaves and degenerates? Finally, can you imagine social conditions in which Jesus Christ, if He returned to earth, would not give an example of obedience and, further, would no longer say: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” ?

Teaching such doctrines, and applying them to its internal organization, the Sillon, therefore, sows erroneous and fatal notions on authority, liberty and obedience, among your Catholic youth. The same is true of justice and equality; the Sillon says that it is striving to establish an era of equality which, by that very fact, would be also an era of greater justice. Thus, to the Sillon, every inequality of condition is an injustice, or at least, a diminution of justice? Here we have a principle that conflicts sharply with the nature of things, a principle conducive to jealousy, injustice, and subversive to any social order. Thus, Democracy alone will bring about

the reign of perfect justice! Is this not an insult to other forms of government which are thereby debased to the level of sterile makeshifts? Besides, the Sillonists once again clash on this point with the teaching of Leo XIII. In the Encyclical on political government which We have already quoted, they could have read this: "Justice being preserved, it is not forbidden to the people to choose for themselves the form of government which best corresponds with their character or with the institutions and customs handed down by their forefathers."

And the Encyclical alludes to the three well-known forms of government, thus implying that justice is compatible with any of them. And does not the Encyclical on the condition of the working class state clearly that justice can be restored within the existing social set-up - since it indicates the means of doing so? Undoubtedly, Leo XIII did not mean to speak of some form of justice, but of perfect justice. Therefore, when he said that justice could be found in any of the three aforesaid forms of government, he was teaching that in this respect Democracy does not enjoy a special privilege. The Sillonists who maintain the opposite view, either turn a deaf ear to the teaching of the Church or form for themselves an idea of justice and equality which is not Catholic.

The same applies to the notion of Fraternity which they found on the love of common interest or, beyond all philosophies and religions, on the mere notion of humanity, thus embracing with an equal love and tolerance all human beings and their miseries, whether these are intellectual, moral, or physical and temporal. But Catholic doctrine tells us that the primary duty of charity does not lie in the toleration of false ideas, however sincere they may be, nor in the theoretical or practical indifference towards the errors and vices in which we see our brethren plunged, but in the zeal for their intellectual and moral improvement as well as for their material well-being. Catholic doctrine further tells us that love for our neighbour flows from our love for God, Who is Father to all, and goal of the whole human family; and in Jesus Christ whose members we are, to the point that in doing good to others we are doing good to Jesus Christ Himself. Any other kind of love is sheer illusion, sterile and fleeting.

Indeed, we have the human experience of pagan and secular societies of ages past to show that concern for common interests or affinities of nature weigh very little against the passions and wild desires of the heart. No, Venerable Brethren, there is no genuine fraternity outside Christian charity. Through the love of God and His Son Jesus Christ Our Saviour, Christian charity embraces all men, comforts all, and leads all to the same faith and same heavenly happiness.

By separating fraternity from Christian charity thus understood, Democracy, far from being a progress, would mean a disastrous step backwards for civilization. If, as We desire with all Our heart, the highest possible peak of well-being for society and its members is to be attained

through fraternity or, as it is also called, universal solidarity, all minds must be united in the knowledge of Truth, all wills united in morality, and all hearts in the love of God and His Son Jesus Christ. But this union is attainable only by Catholic charity, and that is why Catholic charity alone can lead the people in the march of progress towards the ideal civilization.

Finally, at the root of all their fallacies on social questions, lie the false hopes of Sillonists on human dignity. According to them, Man will be a man truly worthy of the name only when he has acquired a strong, enlightened, and independent consciousness, able to do without a master, obeying only himself, and able to assume the most demanding responsibilities without faltering. Such are the big words by which human pride is exalted, like a dream carrying Man away without light, without guidance, and without help into the realm of illusion in which he will be destroyed by his errors and passions whilst awaiting the glorious day of his full consciousness. And that great day, when will it come? Unless human nature can be changed, which is not within the power of the Sillonists, will that day ever come? Did the Saints, who brought human dignity to its highest point, possess that kind of dignity? And what of the lowly of this earth who are unable to rise so high but are content to plough their furrow modestly at the level where Providence placed them? They who are diligently discharging their duties with Christian humility, obedience, and patience, are they not also worthy of being called men? Will not Our Lord take them one day out of their obscurity and place them in heaven amongst the princes of His people?

We close here Our observations on the errors of the Sillon. We do not claim to have exhausted the subject, for We should yet draw your attention to other points that are equally false and dangerous, for example on the manner to interpret the concept of the coercive power of the Church. But We must now examine the influence of these errors upon the practical conduct and upon the social action of the Sillon.

The Sillonist doctrines are not kept within the domain of abstract philosophy; they are taught to Catholic youth and, even worse, efforts are made to apply them in everyday life. The Sillon is regarded as the nucleus of the Future City and, accordingly, it is being made to its image as much as possible. Indeed, the Sillon has no hierarchy. The governing elite has emerged from the rank and file by selection, that is, by imposing itself through its moral authority and its virtues. People join it freely, and freely they may leave it. Studies are carried out without a master, at the very most, with an adviser. The study groups are really intellectual pools in which each member is at once both master and student. The most complete fellowship prevails amongst its members, and draws their souls into close communion: hence the common soul of the Sillon. It has been called a "friendship". Even the priest, on entering, lowers the eminent dignity of his priesthood and, by a strange reversal of roles, becomes a student, placing himself on a level with his young friends, and is no more than a comrade.

In these democratic practices and in the theories of the Ideal City from which they flow, you will recognize, Venerable Brethren, the hidden cause of the lack of discipline with which you have so often had to reproach the Sillon. It is not surprising that you do not find among the leaders and their comrades trained on these lines, whether seminarians or priests, the respect, the docility, and the obedience which are due to your authority and to yourselves; nor is it surprising that you should be conscious of an underlying opposition on their part, and that, to your sorrow, you should see them withdraw altogether from works which are not those of the Sillon or, if compelled under obedience, that they should comply with distaste. You are the past; they are the pioneers of the civilization of the future. You represent the hierarchy, social inequalities, authority, and obedience - worn out institutions to which their hearts, captured by another ideal, can no longer submit to. Occurrences so sad as to bring tears to Our eyes bear witness to this frame of mind. And we cannot, with all Our patience, overcome a just feeling of indignation. Now then! Distrust of the Church, their Mother, is being instilled into the minds of Catholic youth; they are being taught that after nineteen centuries She has not yet been able to build up in this world a society on true foundations; She has not understood the social notions of authority, liberty, equality, fraternity and human dignity; they are told that the great Bishops and Kings, who have made France what it is and governed it so gloriously, have not been able to give their people true justice and true happiness because they did not possess the Sillonist Ideal!

The breath of the Revolution has passed this way, and We can conclude that, whilst the social doctrines of the Sillon are erroneous, its spirit is dangerous and its education disastrous.

But then, what are we to think of its action in the Church? What are we to think of a movement so punctilious in its brand of Catholicism that, unless you embrace its cause, you would almost be regarded as an internal enemy of the Church, and you would understand nothing of the Gospel and of Jesus Christ! We deem it necessary to insist on that point because it is precisely its Catholic ardour which has secured for the Sillon until quite recently, valuable encouragements and the support of distinguished persons. Well now! judging the words and the deeds, We feel compelled to say that in its actions as well as in its doctrine, the Sillon does not give satisfaction to the Church.

In the first place, its brand of Catholicism accepts only the democratic form of government which it considers the most favourable to the Church and, so to speak, identifies it with her. The Sillon, therefore, subjects its religion to a political party. We do not have to demonstrate here that the advent of universal Democracy is of no concern to the action of the Church in the world; we have already recalled that the Church has always left to the nations the care of giving themselves the form of government which they think most suited to their needs. What We wish to affirm once again, after Our Predecessor, is that it is an error and a danger to bind down Catholicism by principle to a particular form of government. This error and this danger

are all the greater when Religion is associated with a kind of Democracy whose doctrines are false. But this is what the Sillon is doing. For the sake of a particular political form, it compromises the Church; it sows division among Catholics, snatches away young people and even priests and seminarians from purely Catholic action, and is wasting away as a dead loss part of the living forces of the nation.

And, behold, Venerable Brethren, an astounding contradiction: It is precisely because religion ought to transcend all parties, and it is in appealing to this principle, that the Sillon abstains from defending the beleaguered Church. Certainly, it is not the Church that has gone into the political arena: they have dragged her here to mutilate and to despoil her. Is it not the duty of every Catholic, then, to use the political weapons which he holds, to defend her? Is it not a duty to confine politics to its own domain and to leave the Church alone except in order to give her that which is her due? Well, at the sight of the violence thus done to the Church, we are often grieved to see the Sillonists folding their arms except when it is to their advantage to defend her; we see them dictate or maintain a program which nowhere and in no degree can be called Catholic. Yet this does not prevent the same men, when fully engaged in political strife and spurred by provocation, from publicly proclaiming their faith. What are we to say except that there are two different men in the Sillonist; the individual, who is Catholic, and the Sillonist, the man of action, who is neutral!

There was a time when the Sillon, as such, was truly Catholic. It recognized but one moral force - Catholicism; and the Sillonists were wont to proclaim that Democracy would have to be Catholic or would not exist at all. A time came when they changed their minds. They left to each one his religion or his philosophy. They ceased to call themselves Catholics and, for the formula "Democracy will be Catholic" they substituted "Democracy will not be anti-Catholic", any more than it will be anti-Jewish or anti-Buddhist. This was the time of "the Greater Sillon". For the construction of the Future City they appealed to the workers of all religions and all sects. These were asked but one thing: to share the same social ideal, to respect all creeds, and to bring with them a certain supply of moral force. Admittedly: they declared that "The leaders of the Sillon place their religious faith above everything. But can they deny others the right to draw their moral energy from whence they can? In return, they expect others to respect their right to draw their own moral energy from the Catholic Faith. Accordingly they ask all those who want to change today's society in the direction of Democracy, not to oppose each other on account of the philosophical or religious convictions which may separate them, but to march hand in hand, not renouncing their convictions, but trying to provide on the ground of practical realities, the proof of the excellence of their personal convictions. Perhaps a union will be affected on this ground of emulation between souls holding different religious or philosophical convictions." And they added at the same time (but how could this be accomplished?) that "the Little Catholic Sillon will be the soul of the Greater Cosmopolitan Sillon."

Recently, the term “Greater Sillon” was discarded and a new organization was born without modifying, quite the contrary, the spirit and the substratum of things: “In order to organize in an orderly manner the different forces of activity, the Sillon still remains as a Soul, a Spirit, which will pervade the groups and inspire their work.” Thus, a host of new groups, Catholic, Protestant, Free-Thinking, now apparently autonomous, are invited to set to work: “Catholic comrades will work between themselves in a special organization and will learn and educate themselves. Protestant and Free-Thinking Democrats will do likewise on their own side. But all of us, Catholics, Protestants and Free-Thinkers will have at heart to arm young people, not in view of the fratricidal struggle, but in view of a disinterested emulation in the field of social and civic virtues.”

These declarations and this new organization of the Sillonist action call for very serious remarks.

Here we have, founded by Catholics, an inter-denominational association that is to work for the reform of civilization, an undertaking which is above all religious in character; for there is no true civilization without a moral civilization, and no true moral civilization without the true religion: it is a proven truth, a historical fact. The new Sillonists cannot pretend that they are merely working on “the ground of practical realities” where differences of belief do not matter. Their leader is so conscious of the influence which the convictions of the mind have upon the result of the action; that he invites them, whatever religion they may belong to, “to provide on the ground of practical realities, the proof of the excellence of their personal convictions.” And with good reason: indeed, all practical results reflect the nature of one’s religious convictions, just as the limbs of a man down to his finger-tips, owe their very shape to the principle of life that dwells in his body.

This being said, what must be thought of the promiscuity in which young Catholics will be caught up with heterodox and unbelieving folk in a work of this nature? Is it not a thousand-fold more dangerous for them than a neutral association? What are we to think of this appeal to all the heterodox, and to all the unbelievers, to prove the excellence of their convictions in the social sphere in a sort of apologetic contest? Has not this contest lasted for nineteen centuries in conditions less dangerous for the faith of Catholics? And was it not all to the credit of the Catholic Church? What are we to think of this respect for all errors, and of this strange invitation made by a Catholic to all the dissidents to strengthen their convictions through study so that they may have more and more abundant sources of fresh forces? What are we to think of an association in which all religions and even Free-Thought may express themselves openly and in complete freedom? For the Sillonists who, in public lectures and elsewhere, proudly proclaim their personal faith, certainly do not intend to silence others nor do they intend to prevent a Protestant from asserting his Protestantism, and the sceptic from affirming his scepticism. Finally, what are we to think of a Catholic who, on entering his study group, leaves

his Catholicism outside the door so as not to alarm his comrades who, “dreaming of disinterested social action, are not inclined to make it serve the triumph of interests, coteries and even convictions whatever they may be”? Such is the profession of faith of the New Democratic Committee for Social Action which has taken over the main objective of the previous organization and which, they say, “breaking the double meaning which surround the Greater Sillon both in reactionary and anti-clerical circles”, is now open to all men “who respect moral and religious forces and who are convinced that no genuine social emancipation is possible without the leaven of generous idealism.”

Alas! yes, the double meaning has been broken: the social action of the Sillon is no longer Catholic. The Sillonist, as such, does not work for a coterie, and “the Church”, he says, “cannot in any sense benefit from the sympathies that his action may stimulate.” A strange situation, indeed! They fear lest the Church should profit for a selfish and interested end by the social action of the Sillon, as if everything that benefited the Church did not benefit the whole human race! A curious reversal of notions! The Church might benefit from social action! As if the greatest economists had not recognized and proved that it is social action alone which, if serious and fruitful, must benefit the Church! But stranger still, alarming and saddening at the same time, are the audacity and frivolity of men who call themselves Catholics and dream of re-shaping society under such conditions, and of establishing on earth, over and beyond the pale of the Catholic Church, “the reign of love and justice” with workers coming from everywhere, of all religions and of no religion, with or without beliefs, so long as they forego what might divide them - their religious and philosophical convictions, and so long as they share what unites them - a “generous idealism and moral forces drawn from whence they can” When we consider the forces, knowledge, and supernatural virtues which are necessary to establish the Christian City, and the sufferings of millions of martyrs, and the light given by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and the self-sacrifice of all the heroes of charity, and a powerful hierarchy ordained in heaven, and the streams of Divine Grace - the whole having been built up, bound together, and impregnated by the life and spirit of Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God, the Word made man - when we think, I say, of all this, it is frightening to behold new apostles eagerly attempting to do better by a common interchange of vague idealism and civic virtues. What are they going to produce? What is to come of this collaboration? A mere verbal and chimerical construction in which we shall see, glowing in a jumble, and in seductive confusion, the words Liberty, Justice, Fraternity, Love, Equality, and human exultation, all resting upon an ill-understood human dignity. It will be a tumultuous agitation, sterile for the end proposed, but which will benefit the less Utopian exploiters of the people. Yes, we can truly say that the Sillon, its eyes fixed on a chimera, brings Socialism in its train.

We fear that worse is to come: the end result of this developing promiscuousness, the beneficiary of this cosmopolitan social action, can only be a Democracy which will be neither Catholic, nor Protestant, nor Jewish. It will be a religion (for Sillonism, so the leaders have said, is a religion) more universal than the Catholic Church, uniting all men become brothers and

comrades at last in the "Kingdom of God". - "We do not work for the Church, we work for mankind."

And now, overwhelmed with the deepest sadness, We ask Ourselves, Venerable Brethren, what has become of the Catholicism of the Sillon? Alas! this organization which formerly afforded such promising expectations, this limpid and impetuous stream, has been harnessed in its course by the modern enemies of the Church, and is now no more than a miserable affluent of the great movement of apostasy being organized in every country for the establishment of a One-World Church which shall have neither dogmas, nor hierarchy, neither discipline for the mind, nor curb for the passions, and which, under the pretext of freedom and human dignity, would bring back to the world (if such a Church could overcome) the reign of legalized cunning and force, and the oppression of the weak, and of all those who toil and suffer.

We know only too well the dark workshops in which are elaborated these mischievous doctrines which ought not to seduce clear-thinking minds. The leaders of the Sillon have not been able to guard against these doctrines. The exaltation of their sentiments, the indiscriminating good-will of their hearts, their philosophical mysticism, mixed with a measure of illuminism, have carried them away towards another Gospel which they thought was the true Gospel of Our Saviour. To such an extent that they speak of Our Lord Jesus Christ with a familiarity supremely disrespectful, and that - their ideal being akin to that of the Revolution - they fear not to draw between the Gospel and the Revolution blasphemous comparisons for which the excuse cannot be made that they are due to some confused and over-hasty composition.

We wish to draw your attention, Venerable Brethren, to this distortion of the Gospel and to the sacred character of Our Lord Jesus Christ, God and man, prevailing within the Sillon and elsewhere. As soon as the social question is being approached, it is the fashion in some quarters to first put aside the divinity of Jesus Christ, and then to mention only His unlimited clemency, His compassion for all human miseries, and His pressing exhortations to the love of our neighbour and to the brotherhood of men. True, Jesus has loved us with an immense, infinite love, and He came on earth to suffer and die so that, gathered around Him in justice and love, motivated by the same sentiments of mutual charity, all men might live in peace and happiness. But for the realization of this temporal and eternal happiness, He has laid down with supreme authority the condition that we must belong to His Flock; that we must accept His doctrine, that we must practice virtue, and that we must accept the teaching and guidance of Peter and his successors. Further, whilst Jesus was kind to sinners and to those who went astray, He did not respect their false ideas, however sincere they might have appeared. He loved them all, but He instructed them in order to convert them and save them. Whilst He called to Himself in order to comfort them, those who toiled and suffered, it was not to preach to them the jealousy of a

chimerical equality. Whilst He lifted up the lowly, it was not to instil in them the sentiment of a dignity independent from, and rebellious against, the duty of obedience. Whilst His heart overflowed with gentleness for the souls of good-will, He could also arm Himself with holy indignation against the profaners of the House of God, against the wretched men who scandalized the little ones, against the authorities who crush the people with the weight of heavy burdens without putting out a hand to lift them. He was as strong as he was gentle. He reproved, threatened, chastised, knowing, and teaching us that fear is the beginning of wisdom, and that it is sometimes proper for a man to cut off an offending limb to save his body. Finally, He did not announce for future society the reign of an ideal happiness from which suffering would be banished; but, by His lessons and by His example, He traced the path of the happiness which is possible on earth and of the perfect happiness in heaven: the royal way of the Cross. These are teachings that it would be wrong to apply only to one's personal life in order to win eternal salvation; these are eminently social teachings, and they show in Our Lord Jesus Christ something quite different from an inconsistent and impotent humanitarianism.

As for you, Venerable Brethren, carry on diligently with the work of the Saviour of men by emulating His gentleness and His strength. Minister to every misery; let no sorrow escape your pastoral solicitude; let no lament find you indifferent. But, on the other hand, preach fearlessly their duties to the powerful and to the lowly; it is your function to form the conscience of the people and of the public authorities. The social question will be much nearer a solution when all those concerned, less demanding as regards their respective rights, shall fulfil their duties more exactly.

Moreover, since in the clash of interests, and especially in the struggle against dishonest forces, the virtue of man, and even his holiness are not always sufficient to guarantee him his daily bread, and since social structures, through their natural interplay, ought to be devised to thwart the efforts of the unscrupulous and enable all men of good will to attain their legitimate share of temporal happiness, We earnestly desire that you should take an active part in the organization of society with this objective in mind. And, to this end, whilst your priests will zealously devote efforts to the sanctification of souls, to the defence of the Church, and also to works of charity in the strict sense, you shall select a few of them, level-headed and of active disposition, holders of Doctors' degrees in philosophy and theology, thoroughly acquainted with the history of ancient and modern civilizations, and you shall set them to the not-so-lofty but more practical study of the social science so that you may place them at the opportune time at the helm of your works of Catholic action. However, let not these priests be misled, in the maze of current opinions, by the miracles of a false Democracy. Let them not borrow from the Rhetoric of the worst enemies of the Church and of the people, the high-flown phrases, full of promises; which are as high-sounding as unattainable. Let them be convinced that the social question and social science did not arise only yesterday; that the Church and the State, at all times and in happy concert, have raised up fruitful organizations to this end; that the Church, which has never betrayed the happiness of the people by consenting to dubious alliances, does

not have to free herself from the past; that all that is needed is to take up again, with the help of the true workers for a social restoration, the organisms which the Revolution shattered, and to adapt them, in the same Christian spirit that inspired them, to the new environment arising from the material development of today's society. Indeed, the true friends of the people are neither revolutionaries, nor innovators: they are traditionalists.

We desire that the Sillonist youth, freed from their errors, far from impeding this work which is eminently worthy of your pastoral care, should bring to it their loyal and effective contribution in an orderly manner and with befitting submission.

We now turn towards the leaders of the Sillon with the confidence of a father who speaks to his children, and We ask them for their own good, and for the good of the Church and of France, to turn their leadership over to you. We are certainly aware of the extent of the sacrifice that We request from them, but We know them to be of a sufficiently generous disposition to accept it and, in advance, in the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ whose unworthy representative We are, We bless them for this. As to the rank and file of the Sillon, We wish that they group themselves according to dioceses in order to work, under the authority of their respective bishops, for the Christian and Catholic regeneration of the people, as well as for the improvement of their lot. These diocesan groups will be independent from one another for the time being. And, in order to show clearly that they have broken with the errors of the past, they will take the name of "Catholic Sillon", and each of the members will add to his Sillonist title the "Catholic" qualification. It goes without saying that each Catholic Sillonist will remain free to retain his political preferences, provided they are purified of everything that is not entirely conformable to the doctrine of the Church. Should some groups refuse, Venerable Brethren, to submit to these conditions, you should consider that very fact that they are refusing to submit to your authority. Then, you will have to examine whether they stay within the limits of pure politics or economics, or persist in their former errors. In the former case, it is clear that you will have no more to do with them than with the general body of the faithful; in the latter case, you will have to take appropriate measures, with prudence but with firmness also. Priests will have to keep entirely out of the dissident groups, and they shall be content to extend the help of their sacred ministry to each member individually, applying to them in the tribunal of penitence the common rules of morals in respect to doctrine and conduct. As for the catholic groups, whilst the priests and the seminarians may favour and help them, they shall abstain from joining them as members; for it is fitting that the priestly phalanx should remain above lay associations even when these are most useful and inspired by the best spirit. Such are the practical measures with which We have deemed necessary to confirm this letter on the Sillon and the Sillonists. From the depths of Our soul We pray that the Lord may cause these men and young people to understand the grave reasons which have prompted it. May He give them the docility of heart and the courage to show to the Church the sincerity of their Catholic fervour. As for you, Venerable Brethren, may the Lord inspire in your hearts towards them - since they will be yours henceforth - the sentiments of a true fatherly love.

In expressing this hope, and to obtain these results which are so desirable, We grant to you, to your clergy and to your people, Our Apostolic benediction with all Our heart.

Given at St. Peter's, Rome, on the 25th August 1910, the eighth year of Our Pontificate.

Pius X, Pope