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EDITORIAL

GOOD FOR FATHER KRESS!

By DANIEL DE LEON

HERALDED by big headlines:

“Vigorous Address on Evils of the Propaganda of Socialism;” and precluded by praises from Father Elliot, the *Washington Times* of the 8th of this month reports an address delivered by Father W.S. Kress at the morning session of the current missionary conference at the Catholic University.

It is our agreeable pleasure to be able, for once, to applaud an adversary, who, in the garb, and under the auspices, and in the name of the Roman Catholic Church machine takes the field against Socialism. The applause that is due to Father Kress’s effort is due to the exceptional wisdom that marked his line of argument, and withal, its sincerity. While all the other prelates, who of late organizedly took the field against Socialism, were venturesome enough to try conclusions with Socialism on a field that the gentlemen were peculiarly unfit for—the field of economic and sociology—Father Kress wisely left that field alone, and he made the only argument that we must admit holds water. The central thought from which Father Kress’s argument proceeded and toward which it climaxed appears in the following passage:

“To expect the average Catholic to discriminate between the true and the false principles of Socialism is to invite disappointment. Contamination is sure to result. Their usual deference and submission to ecclesiastical authority soon gives way to an insolent questioning of the priests’ right to say what is false or true, right or wrong.”

We call this a clear drawing of the line.

Upon the authority of Father Kress, as appears from this passage that the hierarchy demands from its faithful, not merely adherence to theological tenets, but “deference and submission to ecclesiastical authority” upon what is false or true

outside of theology; that any other attitude is considered by the hierarchy as “an insolent questioning of the priest’s right,” and that “the priest’s right” is to utter himself, without there being an appeal from his utterance, upon anything he chooses—“false or true, right or wrong” covering the whole gamut of man’s activity on earth. Socialism interferes, says the Father with such authoritarianism, and the Father obviously considers such authoritarianism as essential to the welfare of the race.

This is not the place for a discussion upon whether Father Kress is right or wrong upon what is good for the human race. Such discussion is unnecessary. Father Kress is of the opinion that blind deference and submission is required by his church organization,—he is authority upon that; and he declares that Socialism interferes with such “deference and submission,”—he is right.

The point whether humanity is fit or unfit to rule itself has been amply debated. To debate it further were idle. The Declaration of Independence would still be unwritten if the Revolutionary fathers had been willing to discuss the point. It is one of the features of that great document that it bars out the discussion. It starts out with the declaration “We hold that,” etc.; in other words, “we are through with discussion and now stand up and be counted.” By bringing out as his central objection to Socialism the fact that it “contaminates” the spirit of “deference and submission” and superinduces “insolent questions”—all of which is true—Father Kress makes quite clear the intellectual line that divides him and his from the Socialists.

We have ever said it, we repeat it now—the path to progress, to order, to intelligent conclusion, lies, not along the path of blurring but along the path of sharply drawing the lines that divide opinion. If the lines are blurred, neither side will know where it is at, and harmony will be furthest away when it seems nearest. On the contrary, only by a sharp drawing of the line can each side understand the other, and above all, can each side UNDERSTAND ITSELF. Then, only then, can the error be located.

We applaud Father Kress, we applaud sincerity wherever found, and we help him to draw the line—Socialism maintains that unquestioning “deference and submission” to man is a badge of stupidity and means of unhappiness; it breeds the

duper and the duped; it steep the race into the abyss of turmoil; it prevents peace on earth.

Socialism stands on that side of the line. Is it wrong? Then march across it to the other. The Father Kresses stand there by their own admission.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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