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EDITORIAL

## FATHER GASSONIANA.

By DANIEL DE LEON

### III.

**A**MONG the general principles, with which the Jesuit Father Thomas I. Gasson combated Socialism in his February 6 Boston address, one is embodied in this sentence:

“Taking the teachings of leaders of many of the Socialist programmes, who teach that, except in mathematics, that all laws are changeable, that teaching is dangerous to the nation.”

We shall not be hard enough upon Father Gasson to put him to his proof. The Rev. Father would find it hard to lay his hands upon any authoritative Socialist utterance made in any such sweeping language. Socialism, being a science, is planted upon facts, hence is careful and precise in its utterances. What Father Gasson may have come across in some Socialist work or other is the view, shared by all sociologists of standing, to the effect that social laws are not, like mathematics, unchangeable, but change along with changed conditions. Waiving, accordingly, the technical right of charging Father Gasson with misquoting, and giving him credit for having meant to quote Socialist writers correctly, his estimate of such Socialist teachings places him outside the pale of scientific reasoning.

Social science does not, primarily, inquire whether a certain teaching is “dangerous to the nation,” or not. Social science inquires, primarily, whether a certain teaching “is true or false.” Only after the truth, or falsity, of a certain teaching has been established does social science utter itself upon the teaching’s dangerousness, or beneficence, to the nation—pronouncing the teaching dangerous, if false; beneficent, if true.

The method of social science eliminates the complexities of private interests. Personal views regarding the dangerousness or beneficence of teachings, or other things, are apt to be echoes of material and, therefore, conflicting sentiments. Even Roman Catholic prelates, when serious errors of individual clericals are mentioned,

explain the errors on the score of the human weakness of the clericals concerned. If prelates, people who claim ex-officio sanctity, can succumb to their personal and material interests, the rest of humanity can surely not be deemed immune to the temptation. Social science takes cognizance of the fact; it relegates the question of a teaching being beneficent or dangerous to the second rank, and makes these views bow to the question of first rank—the truth or falsity of the teaching. Father Gasson reverses the process, with the consequence of rendering his reasoning worthless. Into what entanglements the Father’s method lead those who adopt it the Father’s own words illustrate:—

Father Gasson stood forth on the Boston occasion as the paladin of a number of good things, the Nation, among others. Socialism he opposed as a menace, as a threat to, as subversive of these good things, among them, the Nation. These good things, the Nation among them, Father Gasson wanted to save. And yet, as a consequence of his rejecting the scientific method of first inquiring into the truth, or falsity, of a teaching, and pursuing his own method of starting from the notion which his private interests suggest to him regarding the dangerousness or beneficence of the Socialist teaching concerning the mutability of social laws, Father Gasson strikes a posture that is glaringly subversive of the Nation, of one of the very things he tries to save.

One clause above all others typifies this Nation’s Constitution. That clause is the one that provides for amendments. Other Nations have had Presidents; other Nations have had Congresses; other Nations have had judiciaries; etc.; etc.; but no Nation, before the United States, ever provided in its own organic law for the method of changing that law, and all other laws that flowed from it. The United States was the first Nation that recognized the mutability of social laws and institutions, and imbedded the principle in its supreme charter.

By declaring that the teaching of the changeableness of social laws is a teaching “dangerous to the Nation” Father Gasson places himself in the droll posture of bucking against the typical feature of the Nation that he seeks to preserve—and the good man seems blissfully unconscious of the drollness of his posture.

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