



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Feast of St Benedict – 11th July

Laborare et orare

Readings: Proverbs 2: 1-9, Ps 33, Matthew 19: 27-29

When the late Margaret Thatcher declared that ‘There is no such thing as society’, she was applauded and castigated in about equal measure.

As an abstracted statement, of course, it was nonsense. As the conclusion of what happens if everyone thinks it’s someone else’s job or the responsibility of some imaginary society, then it makes perfect sense.

Society is you and me and everybody else, it does not exist in a vacuum.

When Karl Marx plagiarised the thinking of much earlier socialists, like Louis Blanc (1839) or the 18th century French Utopian, Morelly, and issued his famous line, ‘From each according to his ability to each according to his need’ he was looking forward to the state control and equalisation that would lead to unimagined abundance and wealth.

Unfortunately, because Marx was an atheist and discounted both God and the fallen nature of Man and spent most of his time in libraries, his grasp of the reality of human nature failed to foresee the paranoid tyrannies, mass murder and regular famines that his philosophy entailed.

The casual and often incidental wickedness of monarchy was replaced by highly systematised and ruthlessly efficient cruelty based on a bankrupt philosophy.

For much of the last five hundred years Europe, and thus the regions she has dominated, has been torn between two competing philosophies – the rampant individualism which culminated in dog eat dog Darwinism so beloved of modern atheists and the corporate statist effacement of individual worth and liberty which exploded in the French Revolution and found its natural climax in the great socialist experiments of the last century, Stalin, Mao, Hitler etc.

Many of these errors have their roots in the Reformation. And most particularly in the English settlement.

The monarchs who so enthusiastically embraced it failed to see that the advent of personal choice in authority was not just a poke in the eye for the Pope but was a time bomb ticking at the heart of their own existence.

Even more significant was, in this country, the greatest act of institutional theft in our history, the Dissolution of the Monasteries. For in removing these wholesale, we swept away a thousand years of Christian practice and understanding of the common life and the rules that made it work.

Those rules were derived from St. Benedict and his practical meditations on the Christian life and the life of community. They understood God and they understood Man. They worked.

The monastic rule is there to enable the common life and it is utterly realistic. If we want to know about society and what makes it work, Benedict is a good place to start. Papa Ratzinger did not choose the name by accident.

It is almost 1500 years since Benedict first wrote the rule. Today he is known as Patron of Europe. All the more pity that those creating Europe should be making the same old mistakes by going to great lengths to exclude those central religious truths from their constitution and their governance and returning to the dreary statism that so expensively and spectacularly failed.

A little regular Benedict should be prescribed for both the 'devil take the hindmost' rampant individualist and the control freak corporate statist. Both are at war with God. Both are always paid in blood.

A civilised society in which men and women can grow in peace and freedom requires rules that respect the truth of their being and their creation by a loving God. Bring on St. Benedict.