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Summary of the PhD Dissertation

*Distributism of Hilaire Belloc and Gilbert Keith Chesterton.
Catholic Social Teaching Against the Errors of Capitalism and Socialism*

*Dystrybucjonizm Hilaire Belloca i Gilberta Keitha Chestertona.
Katolicka nauka społeczna przeciwko błędom kapitalizmu i socjalizmu*

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The subject of this dissertation is the economic system known as distributism, which focuses on the importance of widespread (well-distributed) private property in human society. The aim of the study is particularly the issue of identifying, describing, and organising the basic features of this political and legal doctrine from the perspective of the categories of classical political philosophy.

The introductory part of the dissertation provides the historical outline of the doctrine, including information about its authors, both of whom were Catholics of English nationality – Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953) and Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936), together known also as *Chesterbelloc*. Afterwards, the assumed methodology is described. The main thesis of the dissertation is that distributism, as a political and legal doctrine, fits into the trend of political thinking of Catholic social teaching. The secondary thesis (subsidiary to the main one) is that distributism, in its essential assumptions, is a fundamentally different political alternative to capitalism and socialism, which best meets the needs of the economic reality of societies, including human nature. The main applied research method is analysing source texts of Belloc and Chesterton and comparing them to representative examples of documents of the social teaching of the Catholic Church. The introductory part concludes with remarks about the importance of access to private property in the present world.

The first chapter of the study analyses the economic system of capitalism, as seen through the scope of writings of Belloc and Chesterton, compared to the papal documents of Catholic social teaching. In the beginning, the historical background is described, proving that the conception of capitalism was inseparably connected with the Protestant Reformation – mostly because of the materialistic morality spread by the influence of the new religion. This led to the establishment of the essential traits of capitalism, which are described as limited access to private property of the determining majority of society, resulting in limited access to economic freedom; while preserving universal political freedom. Practical factors leading to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of few are identified as unrestricted competition, monopolies, and usury – all of which are fruits of the inactivity of the state. Subsequently, the moral decline of the capitalistic society is described, as well as the essential instability of the economic system of this kind. The chapter concludes by identifying capitalism as a “heretical” system, i.e. an intrinsically inconsistent entity, inevitably destined to an eventual collapse.

The second chapter of the study focuses on the assumptions of the economic system known as socialism. Using the same research method as in the previous chapter (meaning applying writings of *Chesterbelloc* and the papal documents of Catholic social teaching) the essence of socialism is described as the attempt to abolish the institution of private property,

followed by the universal collective application of collective property governed by the omnipotent state. These assumptions are described as the development of the materialistic nature of the capitalistic state. The negative consequences of the aprioristic idea of negating the human need for private property are shown through the distributist writings, as well as citing numerous condemnations of socialism (also known as communism and collectivism) included in the teaching of the Catholic Church. The essence of the analysed system is ultimately so repulsive to human nature, that its attempted foundation in reality has to be imposed on societies by sheer force, leading to suffering and even genocide experienced by the masses of citizens. Due to this violent possibility, the more practical fruit of the socialistic reform is predicted by the distributist writers to be the return of the pagan servile state, in which citizens are legally divided into two groups: slaves and free owners. The chapter concludes by summarising socialism as the creation of the limited, primitive mind of the new pagan reformer.

The third chapter, being the longest one, focuses directly on the economic system known as distributism. Its essential features are identified, described and organised mostly by citing numerous source texts written by Belloc and Chesterton; and its uniformity with Catholic social teaching is proved by comparing the aforementioned writings with papal teaching and other relevant documents. At the beginning of the chapter, the significance of the economic systems of the Middle Ages, acting as an inspiration for the distributist writers, is shown. Afterwards, the essential importance of private property is described. According to the analysis, this institution is the only effective guarantee of economic freedom for individuals and families. From this conclusion stems the main objective of an inherently good economic system, which is the wide distribution of useful private property amongst the citizens of the community – which characterizes distributism (or the distributive state). Subsequently, the importance of an appropriately active state in distributism is analysed, which is closely connected to the principle of subsidiarity. The next part shows what concrete legal tools such a state can use to encourage the distribution of wealth, as well as guard existing owners. The main examples shown are the differential tax and the guild system. These practical solutions are supposed to be supported by the moral dimension of distributism, which is the subject of the next part of the chapter. The study focuses here on the importance of a proper understanding of private property, which involves proper enjoyment of ownership, meaning active and responsible appreciation of its positive effects on the individual. This includes also the application of the principle of solidarity, which recognizes the value of the common good – in the case of distributism resulting in the efforts to obtain and stabilize widespread private property in the society. The perspective described in the chapter is then summarised by the conclusion that ownership of

material goods should only be viewed as an instrument needed for a good, virtuous life, not as the goal in itself. The best guarantee of such an approach is the assumption of Christian morality, embodied in the teaching of the Catholic Church. The chapter concluded with remarks about the practical character of the distributive state, including its organic nature, as well as a realistic approach to the attainable number of owners in any real human community.

The study ends with final conclusions, which start with the summary of the main thesis of the dissertation. Analysing the topic using categories of classical political philosophy – such as human, society, property, political power, and the state – it is shown that distributism indeed fits into the trend of political thinking of Catholic social teaching. In the next part, the secondary thesis is proven by showing that distributism truly is an alternative to capitalism and socialism, being able to effectively satisfy the economic needs of human nature. This trait is supported by the truly catholic nature of the studied system, which in this context not only means its uniformity with the teaching of the Catholic Church – but in a more general way its universal, holistic nature, which addresses every level of existence, thus resulting in the best possible political and legal results. The dissertation concludes with remarks about the place of distributism in English political tradition, firstly addressing its similarities to the fantasy writings of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, then searching for its roots in the medieval ideal of Merry England, and lastly connecting the doctrine of Belloc and Chesterton to their Christian desire to rebuild in England the New Jerusalem.