

Catholic Social Teaching: Eight Principles of Social Justice

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Introduction

The Church has always had a “social” morality.¹ It is clear that the New Testament presents Jesus’ gospel as inclusive of social justice and mercy. Moreover, Old Testament morality provides a background to this gospel for it already articulates many of the necessary components for a just socioeconomic order, e.g., in the teachings of the prophets and the Ten Commandments.² However, “Jesus perfects and radicalizes these, by teaching a mercy which goes beyond what is usually regarded as justice. Love of neighbor, and even of enemies, demands in practice that those who accept God’s loving kindness extend it to others in concrete ways.”³

Though Jesus was no political reformer preaching a political program, his message obviously extended to concern for the temporal order. Thus, as the Jesuit political philosopher James Schall has written, “If the purpose of the New Testament was to teach man about his ultimate, not political, destiny, it did not imply that there was no connection whatsoever between these two purposes. The New Testament treated man as a whole in which all human actions and deeds fit together, including man’s relation to God and to the polity.”⁴

The Church too, following her Lord, preaches the message of salvation *cum* social responsibility.⁵ Pope John Paul II teaches in this regard: “Over and over again the Church proclaims her conviction that *the core of the Gospel is fraternal love springing from love of God*. The proclamation of the new commandment of love can never be separated from efforts to promote the integral advancement of man in justice and peace” (*Discourse to the Bishops of India*, 1986).⁶ Therefore, either a so-called “this-worldly” interpretation of Catholic social teaching or a so-called “other-worldly” interpretation misconceives this teaching. Rather, as the

Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) expresses it, “the Church is concerned with the temporal aspects of the common good because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, our ultimate end” (*Catechism*, #2420).

Stating that the Church has a social teaching does not, of course, resolve the conflicts over how to *interpret* this large body of teaching. For example, there are differences over when we *date* the advent of modern Catholic social teaching. While it is common to mark the beginning of this teaching with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, one author sees the year 1740, beginning with the pontificate of Benedict XIV, as the starting point.⁷ There is also disagreement on the issue of which theory adequately explains the *coherency* (though not all agree it *is* coherent!) of Catholic social teaching amidst its long history and many developments: a theory of natural law, human dignity, or communitarianism?⁸ Additionally, there are various *criticisms* of the Church’s social teaching put forth by feminist and liberation theologians on the left, and certain neoconservatives on the right. Moreover, there are controversies surrounding the *application* of this teaching to specific issues, e.g., affirmative action, union strikes, and capital punishment to name just a few.⁹ Finally, there are what I would refer to as *pastoral problems*, e.g., difficulties concerning how the Church should preach on social justice issues, the reasons why the teaching is often ignored by priests and lay people, etc.¹⁰

In this paper, I will examine the *philosophical* and *theological* foundations of the Church’s social teaching. Since it aims to guide Christian behavior, it is significant to note that the Church’s social teaching or social doctrine,¹¹ Pope John Paul II argues, “belongs to the field, not of *ideology*, but of *theology* and particularly moral theology” (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 1987, #41). And so, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, this teaching “proposes principles for reflection; it provides criteria for judgment; [and] it gives guidelines for action...” (#2423).¹² With all due respect for the various Twelve Step programs, I will articulate Catholic social doctrine in *eight basic principles*. These are principles which emerge from an effort on the part of the Church to formulate its almost two-thousand year historical political and social experience “in the light of biblical teaching, as well as the sound results of political theory from Plato and Aristotle to the present.”¹³

However, my paper will not attempt to trace the entire historical development of Catholic social thought. Neither will it venture into every “nook and cranny” of Church teaching in this area. It will simply provide a basic overview of the teaching by way of a summary of the Church’s central social principles, with particular emphasis on how these principles determine a just social and economic order.¹⁴ Though not in any way an exhaustive treatment, it does hope to offer some general guidance to the teaching.

To accomplish these goals, I will first briefly clarify what the term “social justice” means. Second, relying for guidance on the social and political thought of such Catholic theologians as Benedict Ashley, O.P. and Germain Grisez, I will expound the major principles of Catholic social teaching. Moreover, throughout our discussion I will show where these principles are found in magisterial documents, especially the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Finally, I will offer some pastoral suggestions for how the Church’s teaching in this difficult area can be more effectively communicated to Catholics.

Part I. The Meaning of “Social Justice”

Before we concern ourselves with the philosophical and theological foundations of the Church’s social teaching, it is necessary to clarify the Church’s use of the term “social justice.”¹⁵ This term has caused consternation among some religious and secular conservatives for implying some kind of socialist economic arrangement. Moreover, the term is a fairly recent one - first explicitly articulated by Pius XI in his 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo anno*. It is also, one must admit, a concept susceptible to ideological manipulation on behalf of desires dressed up as “rights.”¹⁶

However, the magisterium developed the notion of “social justice” because in modern times justice had been reduced to contractual and individualistic understandings. Restricting justice in this way obscured the responsibility that all individuals and groups in a society have to “direct their private actions bearing upon one another to the common good.”¹⁷ Therefore, the magisterium employs the idea of *social* justice to remind us that justice requires more than the duty to honor one’s prior agreements in private life, but also involves the welfare of the larger society.

Nevertheless, *defining* “social justice” remains difficult and controversial.¹⁸ For many,

the idea is vague and “uncommonly slippery.”¹⁹ The neoconservative theologian and social philosopher Michael Novak tries to formulate a “neutral” definition which he maintains is free of any particular ideological commitments. He proposes the following definition: “*Social justice is a specific modern form of the ancient virtue of justice. Men and women exercise this specific social habit when they (a) join with others (b) to change the institutions of society.*”²⁰ For Novak, social justice means “organizing; it means trying to make the system better. It does not necessarily mean enlarging the state; on the contrary, it means enlarging civil society.”²¹ Though by no means a perfect definition, it is probably the most adequate one that I have found. It can serve as a useful standard in judging the adequacy of other definitions.

Part II. Eight Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

I begin my analysis of the principles of Catholic social teaching with a helpful quote from the theologian David Bohr. He states that this teaching “seeks to bring the gospel’s vision of human life and its meaning to bear upon the societal structures and needs of a given historical time. While it remains constant in its fundamental principles and directives, which are rooted in the Good News of Jesus Christ, this social doctrine continues to change as it adapts to historical conditions and the unceasing flow of world events.”²²

Bohr’s point is a simple one: the Church formulates certain timeless moral principles, but does so within the contingent circumstances of history. Although the point may be simple, clear thinking on it is necessary to accurately grasp what the Church teaches about social justice. I explicitly allude to it because if one does *not* do so, much confusion is created, e.g., concerning (1) what is binding on the consciences of the faithful versus what one is able to legitimately disagree about and (2) the distinction between general principles and their application to specific issues.²³

Vatican Council II speaks of this same point when it refers to the Church’s duty to examine the “signs of the times” *in the light of the gospel* (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, #4). In addition to reflection on revelation, the Church must also consider *contextual aspects* or what the moral theologian Germain Grisez calls “situational factors.” “Paying attention to [them] does not mean relativizing faith or attempting to judge it by contemporary insights, attitudes, and values; the latter, rather, are to be judged by faith, whose light illuminates the contemporary world and

makes its true significance appear. That significance must be grasped and acted upon.”²⁴

The Church’s social teaching, then, is not proposed as a blueprint for creating a “heaven on earth.” Again, as Grisez comments, “The Church has no plan for an ideal sociopolitical order; instead she articulates relevant moral norms.”²⁵ These norms must be applied by Catholics in the social order so that they may faithfully read and respond to the “signs of the times.” How does the Church derive these norms? To answer this question we need to know the underlying fundamental *principles* from which these norms will be generated.

First, there is *the principle of respect for the dignity of the human person*.²⁶ Because human persons are created – male and female - in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Genesis* 1:26-27) and are endowed by nature with intelligence and freedom, they have precisely the same essential dignity.²⁷ And for Christians, there is also the unique relationship they have now and eternally with God the Father through His Son, Jesus. Thus, St. Paul writes: “In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith ... There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (*Galations* 3:26, 28).

However, this essential dignity must be properly interpreted. For example, it must not be understood in a totalitarian sense. As the Dominican theologian Benedict Ashley states: “[A] community of persons exists for its members and not the members for the community.”²⁸ Yet, neither must it be understood in an individualistic sense. While the *raison d’etre* of the community is to serve the good(s) of human persons, “*the highest personal goods are common goods*.”²⁹ These are goods “which can only be achieved and fully enjoyed in common, e.g. truth, love, beauty, worship.”³⁰ In addition to these goods, which are essentially *spiritual* realities, we have “private needs for *material* things whose use demands that they be divided and distributed and hence used in a private way, e.g. my clothing, the food I consume.”³¹ The Church has always stressed this social or communal nature of human existence as constitutive of what it means to be a human person.³² The *Catechism* puts the matter this way: “The human person needs to live in society. Society is not for him an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature” (#1879).

Hence, unlike many secular philosophies which understand the principle of dignity to

mean that all differences among persons must be ignored or overcome and/or interpret it in a radically autonomous sense to permit such acts as abortion, suicide, and drug use; and unlike various ideologies of “social stratification” (e.g., racism and sexism) which deny the equality as human beings of those who are dominated, the Church opposes both egalitarianism and social stratification.³³ It rejects egalitarianism because it denies important differences: unique gifts (e.g., gender) which belong to an individual’s personhood and are “essential to [his or her] fulfillment”;³⁴ it rejects social stratification because various differences (e.g., in I.Q., skin color, ethnicity, etc.) are used to justify the domination of the “superior” over the “inferior.” While sexual differentiation is intrinsic to personhood and part of our common human nature, the latter differences, such as one’s race or ethnic background, although highly significant, are, as the scholastics would say, accidental characteristics of personhood.³⁵

Contrary to these ideologies, the *Catechism* affirms: “Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: all therefore enjoy an equal dignity” (#1934). Still, there are some differences which, according to the *Catechism*, “belong to God’s plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others ...” (#1937). “These differences should encourage charity” (#1946) the *Catechism* informs us. However, this is altogether different than what the *Catechism* refers to as “*sinful* [social and economic] *inequalities* that affect millions of men and women” (#1938), and forms of discrimination which deny basic human rights on the basis of such things as sex, race, color, class, language, and religion (#1935).

Our second principle of social justice is *distributive equality of common goods*;³⁶ “not in the sense of arithmetic equality, but in the sense of distributive justice by which each member has his or her needs met to his or her capacity.”³⁷ However, because of our capacity for selfishness, this principle is often neglected, and social injustice occurs. Yet, the achievement of a truly just human community vitally depends upon its realization. To help realize it, Catholics should stress the importance of developing the “virtue of solidarity.” This virtue, often called “social charity,” involves a “specific moral attitude... by which individuals fulfill themselves by including the common good in their proper goods.”³⁸ Moreover, solidarity “implements love of neighbor, for it undertakes the work of love: to serve others rather than dominate them, to

sacrifice oneself for them rather than exploit them.”³⁹

The *Catechism* points out that this particular moral commitment also includes material goods as well as “the spiritual goods of the faith,” which act as a *stimulus* for temporal advancement (#1942). Here too, Catholics should show the intimate connection that exists, for instance, between efforts on behalf of social justice and the heavenly kingdom. On this point, Vatican Council II teaches, that “although earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ’s kingdom, still, insofar as earthly progress can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is very important to God’s kingdom” (*Gaudium et spes*, #39).

Also necessary to ensure social justice is respect for a “*division of labor or function* because the members of a community are unequal in various ways...”⁴⁰ That is, each of us lack a particular gift that the other has and vice versa. Thus, our own contribution to the common good will manifest unique characteristics which are ours alone to offer. This is the *third* social principle that we formulate.

However, as Ashley cautions us, the “division is functional, not final.”⁴¹ His point here is that there is a danger of turning the functional division of labor into what amounts to a “rigid caste system.” The *Catechism* likewise warns against “any system in which social relationships are determined entirely by economic factors” (#2423). As examples of this oppressive phenomenon, we can point to our past experience with slavery in this country and the present caste system in India.⁴²

Fourth, we have what we call *the principle of authority*.⁴³ It is one principle that will not win any popularity contests today.⁴⁴ For we are suspicious of authority because of its abuses - both in the Church and in society.⁴⁵ However, with Father Richard John Neuhaus, we must distinguish between *authority* and *authoritarianism*.⁴⁶ Authoritarianism is the use of authority for authority’s sake. It is the desire to “lord it over” others, i.e., to control and dominate those who are ruled. Authority, however, is the capacity to make decisions *on behalf* of a community. Its exercise (especially the more-than-human authority of the magisterium) is to be carried out as a *service* to benefit the *common good* of a community.⁴⁷ Unlike authoritarianism, authority appeals to human freedom and the necessity of cooperation in achieving human goods. Far from diminishing human dignity, the authority-obedience relationship *presupposes* personal equality

and free choice.⁴⁸

Indeed, the *Catechism* itself affirms that “Every human community needs an authority in order to survive and develop.” Quoting *Gaudium et spes*, #74, it states that authority pertains to “an order established by God” (#1920). However, the exercise of authority, according to the *Catechism*, can be justified “only when it seeks the common good...” and respects the moral order (#1903).

For the good of the Church and of society, Catholics have a responsibility not only to explain the Christian conception of authority, but also to live it after the example of Jesus: to serve rather than to be served. This is not, of course, an easy task. Not only is authority often abused, but “authority and obedience necessarily limit people’s freedom to do as they please, and this freedom is overvalued by contemporary Western culture.”⁴⁹ Thus, Catholics are up against a culture that rejects authority and accepts the ideal of personal autonomy as a “self-evident truth.”⁵⁰

Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, if Catholics exercise authority as a form of loving service, they can persuade people that authority is not some necessary evil, but a *value* that every human community needs to function harmoniously. However, this appreciative attitude toward authority does not imply a “blind obedience.” On the contrary, we are to obey only morally legitimate exercises of authority. For as Christians, we believe that human authorities are under the authority of God, indeed, that they derive their authority from God (cf. *Romans* 13:1-2). Therefore, respect for authority is compatible with a critical eye. Still, a “hermeneutics of trust” rather than a “hermeneutics of suspicion” should be our fundamental stance towards authority in the Church.⁵¹

Fifth, is what we refer to as *the principle of participation*.⁵² “‘Participation’ is the voluntary and generous engagement of a person in social interchange. It is necessary that all participate, each according to his role, in promoting the common good” (*Catechism*, #1913). Because human persons are rational beings, gifted with the power of free choice, by which they determine their moral identity or character,⁵³ they need to “participate in decisions as well as obey the decisions necessary for common action.”⁵⁴ If one refuses or is denied such participation, one loses his or her “share in the creativity which is so important a part of the

common spiritual good.”⁵⁵

To foster participation, individuals must take their *personal responsibility* seriously: by caring for one’s family, putting in a good day’s work,⁵⁶ maintaining high standards in one’s chosen profession, etc. (*Catechism*, #1914). Moreover, while allowing for differences in one’s vocation, “citizens should take an active part in *public life*.” However, as the *Catechism* notes, “The manner of this participation may vary from one country or culture to another” (*Catechism*, #1915).

In addition, the *Catechism* emphasizes that lay initiative “is necessary especially when the matter involves discovering or inventing the means for permeating social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life” (#899). Thus, for the Christian lay faithful, it is their vocation to carry out Christ’s redemptive work “in the world.” “There,” as *Lumen gentium* expresses it, “they are called by God that, being led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties” (#31).⁵⁷ The laity can be helped to do this only by means of a sound catechesis which teaches them Christian moral principles and assists them in the process of conscience formation.

Sixth, in order to facilitate participation in common decision, the political order needs to respect “*the principles of subsidiarity and functionalism*, i.e., decisions should be made by those most concerned and most aware of the needs to be met.”⁵⁸ The principle of subsidiarity, which Michael Allsopp calls a “central norm of 20th-century Roman Catholic social theory,”⁵⁹ was first explicitly formulated in 1931 by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno*: “Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also is it an injustice and at the same time a great evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater or higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them” (#79). Ashley offers the following sound interpretation of the principle: The “process of decision-making should be kept as close to the local community as possible. Only those decisions which directly affect the wider community should be made at higher levels of organization, although these higher levels must assist the

lower to fulfill their proper functions...”⁶⁰

There will always be tension in finding the proper balance between intervention and freedom, even when the extremes of socialist central planning and capitalist *laissez-faire* systems are avoided. For example, take our recently past (and never ending!) debate over “welfare reform.”⁶¹ Most admitted that our federal welfare system was in need of an overhaul. But precisely *what* should be done to reform it had been the question. However, apart from specific programs, it seems quite evident that our pre-reform system had violated the principle of subsidiarity, which, in turn, resulted in dependency and family decline.⁶² In his 1991 social encyclical *Centesimus annus*, John Paul II addressed this very problem of (what he calls) the “social assistance state”: “By intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility, the Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending. In fact, it would appear that needs are best understood and satisfied by people who are closest to them and who act as neighbors to those in need” (#48).

In principle, there is nothing wrong with the present effort (despite its faults and difficulties) to shift the responsibilities of welfare from the federal government to the states; in fact, I believe, it is the way in which the principle of subsidiarity can be more fully realized. We can go even further and promote efforts for remedying poverty by private and religious institutions.⁶³ What specific legislation will look like is another matter that needs to be debated. However, the experience of the last thirty plus years indicates that the state is not only limited in what it can do to alleviate poverty, but it is also quite “effective” at making many social crises even worse.⁶⁴

We arrive now at the seventh principle of Catholic social teaching. It is *the principle of the common good*.⁶⁵ According to the *Catechism*, the common good is defined as (and here it quotes *Gaudium et spes*, #26): “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily” (#1906). It consists of three essential components: “[1] respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person; [2] prosperity, or the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society;

[3] the peace and security of the group and of its members” (#1925).

In calling the common good a *principle* of social justice, we need to qualify this somewhat. Though the common good is the principle of any community’s existence, it cannot determine what *is*, in fact, just; “it only requires that the community’s structures and actions be just.”⁶⁶ Their justice must be decided on the basis of *moral* principles, namely the principles of “moral rectitude” and “fairness,” i.e., the Golden Rule.⁶⁷ So, although the common good is not an independent principle of justice, the Church finds it useful to appeal to the common good. Why? Because “many duties toward others presuppose community [and] people often try to rationalize violations of justice by ignoring or denying community,” talk of the common good can remind one of “the reality of community, in this way reinforcing the responsibilities that follow from one’s role in it, from fairness, and from other moral principles,”⁶⁸ e.g., that one does not repay evil with evil.

The eighth and final principle is really, from the standpoint of Christian faith, the most important of them all. It is *the principle of Christian love*. Jesus, by linking the separate Old Testament commands to love God and to love one’s neighbor (e.g., see *Matthew* 22:35-40), “makes it clear that one has no more basic responsibility toward others than to love them.”⁶⁹ However, the commandment to love one’s neighbor does not by itself specify *how* one is to love the neighbor. Rather, it concerns “the inner principle...which should animate and motivate” every specific commandment, which requires what one should do or should not do.⁷⁰

This love has a twofold structure: more than a warm feeling, “it is readiness and willingness to try to benefit others;” and contrary to various anti-life ideologies, “it is unreadiness and unwillingness to harm them.”⁷¹ There are many other characteristics of Christian neighbor love, which had we more space, we could spell out in greater detail. For example, it will be benevolent, upright, and holy; it will include love of every human person; it will include the love of enemies, while not condoning their vice or sin; it will transcend the usual limits of human love set by hopelessness, indifference, individualism, and death; it will also imply loving one another as Jesus loves us; and finally, it will entail not restricting this love to fellow Christians but including every member of the human family.⁷²

We have considered Catholic social teaching from the perspective of its fundamental

social-moral principles. This teaching, found primarily in papal social encyclicals, and in several documents promulgated by the Vatican Council II and various Congregations - and based on scripture, tradition, and reason - has been freshly summarized and re-articulated (as we have seen) in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. While we were not able to treat every basic concept that the Church uses to guide its understanding of social, political, and economic realities, we did try to formulate the core principles which undergird Church teaching in these specific areas, e.g., the family.⁷³

Part III. Pastoral Suggestions for Communicating the Vision of Catholic Social Teaching

At this point I want to offer six general suggestions for how the Church can better communicate its social teaching to Catholics.

First, we have to distinguish, as the theologian J. Brian Benestad has noted, between (1) evangelization, which is the proclamation of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ; (2) Catholic social teaching, which offers an education in political and social principles; and (3) policy statements, which are an application of Catholic social teaching to particular issues. Concerning the latter, Benestad comments: “Reliance on Catholic social teaching does not insure that a policy statement will be wise or effective. Drawing guidance from Catholic social principles in order to propose specific solutions to public problems requires keen perception of many particulars and the virtue of political prudence. Policy statements, whether issued by bishops, clergy or lay people, must be submitted to careful scrutiny.”⁷⁴ Benestad notes further that Catholic social teaching is essentially a subdivision of evangelization broadly understood.⁷⁵

Second, we need to keep the focus on the living presence of Jesus Christ in his Church, and identify the Christian life as one which flows from an encounter with Him. “The Christian life,” as one author put it, “is not primarily a morality; it is not a sociology; it is not a politics.”⁷⁶ Rather, it is an encounter with a person - the person of Jesus. This is a point, then, regarding the rationale of *why* we do what we do.

Third, we must preach a distinctive moral language which goes beyond legalism and moralism and which is cautious in its use of the language of rights so prevalent in our culture, dominated as it is by secular humanism.⁷⁷ Although the Church makes use of the language of rights in its social teaching in order to point out the demands of justice - especially in the area of

social life - “rights talk” is often ambiguous and susceptible to abuse.⁷⁸ Rights flow from *moral principles*; they are not principles of justice in themselves.

Fourth, we should foster attitudes which understand and approach the whole area of social responsibilities in a *specifically Catholic Christian way*.⁷⁹ Against all forms of either utopianism or apathy, our prime objective must be: “not to establish the kingdom on earth, but to do what can be done within an integrated Christian life to promote the kingdom, which is not of this world.”⁸⁰

Fifth, practically speaking, our task should focus on helping Catholics further social justice, not as an afterthought, but *as a necessary element of their vocation*, and always in accord with it. This will involve practicing a more authentically Christian style of life, e.g., “setting aside individualism and adopting the attitude of solidarity with the poor and oppressed.”⁸¹ One way of implementing this solidarity is to see one’s *personal vocation* as the standard for determining what one should purchase, acquire, give away, and do in the public square.

Sixth, we must encourage different ways of working for social justice, though always from the standpoint of Christian faith and adherence to morally upright means. All of this presupposes that the local Church, including the parish, will be a place where social justice is properly taught and preached as integral to the Christian vocation. This can be done in many ways. For example, by providing instruction in RCIA programs, in the Sunday homily, in Advent and Lenten lecture series, in the parish bulletin, in the Church book rack, etc. There is much room for creativity on this score!

Conclusion

In order to increase our contribution to building a ‘civilization of love’ - a constant theme of both Popes Paul VI and John Paul II - I believe, with J. Brian Benestad, that we need “to seek justice primarily through evangelization and education into the rich heritage of the Catholic social and political tradition.”⁸² However, as Benestad argues, this approach should not be dismissed as “ineffective or conservative.”⁸³ For one thing, he reminds us, Catholic social ethics vigorously “stresses the close connection between the formation of character and the quality of the political order; it opposes reducing the purpose of political life to comfortable self-preservation; it upholds the spiritual dimension of the human person and argues that there is a

genuine common good distinct from the sum of individual interests.”⁸⁴ Hopefully, at least some of these themes were illuminated in my paper.

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- ¹ However, as the Catholic legal scholar Gerard V. Bradley has noted, this “social” morality is not sharply divided from a “private” morality governing the conduct of individuals... Catholic moral reflection is not so divided. [Catholic Social Thought] is continuous with private morality. The same *basic* norms govern all human choices. There is no separate public morality in the Catholic tradition.” Gerard V. Bradley, “Moral Truth, the Common Good, and Judicial Review,” in Kenneth L. Grasso, Gerard V. Bradley, and Robert P. Hunt (eds.), *Catholicism, Liberalism, and Communitarianism: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the Moral Foundations of Democracy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Pub., 1995) 115-116.
- ² Cf. Roger Charles, S.J., with Drostan Maclaren, O.P., *The Social Teaching of Vatican II: Its Origin and Development* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982) 48-56; *Catechism*, Part Three, Section Two.
- ³ Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus, vol. 2: Living a Christian Life* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993) 99.
- ⁴ James Schall, S. J., “The Person From Within: The Foundations of Social Teachings,” in Schall, *Does Catholicism Still Exist?* (N.Y.: Alba House, 1994) 170.
- ⁵ For a nuanced discussion of the relationship between the Church’s “primary purpose” or “proper mission” (=salvation) and its social responsibilities, see Avery Dulles, S. J., “Vatican II and the Purpose of the Church,” in Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988) 132-153.
- ⁶ Quoted in Grisez 99, footnote 32. References to documents of the magisterium and to Sacred Scripture will be given, for the most part, in the body of the paper.
- ⁷ Michael J. Schuck, *That They Be One: The Social Teaching of the Papal Encyclicals 1740-1989* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), Preface. Schuck divides Catholic social teaching into three main periods: the pre-Leonine (1740-1877), the Leonine (1878-1958), and the post-Leonine (1959-1989).
- ⁸ On this question, see Schuck 73-89. While Schuck himself opts for a version of “communitarianism,” other authors would opt for either human dignity or natural law, or propose different theories of “coherency.” For example, Donal Dorr approaches Catholic social teaching from the perspective of the “option for the poor” in his book *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching*, revised ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992); see especially Dorr’s introduction.
- ⁹ While these issues are commonly referred to as “domestic” problems, Catholic social teaching also addresses such “foreign” or “global” problems as war and peace, population control, and human rights. However, my focus will not be on any of these specific issues. Rather, in this paper I am more concerned with “theory” than “praxis.”
- ¹⁰ In my own experience of teaching in a Catholic seminary and discussing these pastoral problems with seminarians and priests, I have found that many of these problems arise from a fivefold fear: (1) that they are not competent to address political and economic

questions; (2) that they will be labeled a “liberal activist” or a “social justice priest”; (3) that they will alienate their parishioners by addressing such sensitive areas as a person’s “economic lifestyle”; (4) that they will be accused of hypocrisy, e.g., how can the Church preach social justice if it does not pay its own workers a just wage?; and (5) that the social teaching of the Church is not as “cut and dry” as the Church’s teaching on sexual morality.

¹¹ For a discussion of the distinctions among the terms Catholic social “teaching,” “doctrine,” “ethics,” and “thought,” see Schuck, “Modern Catholic Social Thought,” in Judith A. Dwyer (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994) 614.

¹² On this point, see also Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church’s Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, 1988, Parts III-V.

¹³ Benedict Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree, MA: Pope John Center, 1995, original ed. 1985) 455. Much of this history is discussed in Charles, *The Social Teaching of Vatican II*. For collections of the major documents of the social magisterium, see David J. O’Brien and Thomas Shannon (eds.), *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), which contains all of the papal social encyclicals and the U.S. Bishops’ *The Challenge of Peace and Economic Justice for All*; and Michael Walsh and Brian Davies (eds.) *Proclaiming Justice and Peace: Papal Documents from Rerum Novarum through Centesimus Annus*, revised and expanded (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Pub., 1991) which contains twelve complete and two excerpted documents.

¹⁴ Cf. United States Catholic Conference, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* and the *Summary Report of the Task Force on Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Education* (Washington, D.C.: U.S.C.C., 1998); William J. Byron, “Ten Building Blocks of Catholic Social Teaching,” *America* (October 31, 1998): 9-12.

¹⁵ Ashley notes that the magisterium uses this term to encompass both what the scholastics called “legal justice” and “distributive justice.” Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love: A Biblical Introduction to Moral Theology* (N.Y.: Alba House, 1996) 342.

¹⁶ Cf. from a non-religious angle, the conservative economist and social critic Thomas Sowell, *The Vision of the Anointed: Self-Congratulation as a Basis for Social Policy* (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1995) 99-101; 209-211, and more generally, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice* (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1999).

¹⁷ Grisez 328.

¹⁸ Cf. from vastly different perspectives: John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 184-188, 196; and Ernest Fortin, “Natural Law and Social Justice,” *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 30 (1985): 1-20.

¹⁹ Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1993) 77.

²⁰ Novak 77-78. For a history of the term “social justice,” including Novak’s understanding of it, and objections to it by such thinkers as Friedrich von Hayek, see Novak 62-88. Cf.

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- Robert Royal, "Social Justice," in Russell Shaw (ed.), *Our Sunday Visitor's Encyclopedia of Catholic Doctrine* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997) 639-641; Bernard V. Brady, *The Moral Bond of Community: Justice and Discourse in Christian Morality* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998) 120-122.
- ²¹ Novak 78. On the role of civil society in this understanding of social justice, see Novak 80-86.
- ²² David Bohr, *Catholic Moral Tradition*, revised (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1999) 325. See also *Catechism*, #2422.
- ²³ Cf. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace*, 1983, #9-11.
- ²⁴ Grisez 58.
- ²⁵ Grisez 262.
- ²⁶ Cf. Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 455; Grisez 460-469
- ²⁷ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *On the Dignity of Women*, in *Origins* 18 (October 6, 1988), #6; Francis Martin, "Male and Female He Created Them: A Summary of the Teaching of Genesis Chapter 1," *Communio* 20 (Summer 1993): 240-265.
- ²⁸ Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 455.
- ²⁹ Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 455.
- ³⁰ Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 455.
- ³¹ Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 455.
- ³² Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, Part One, Chapter Two.
- ³³ Cf. Grisez 380-381. Cf. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love*, on the "error of egalitarianism" (282-284) and the problem of (what he calls) "social differentiation" (368-370).
- ³⁴ Grisez 380.
- ³⁵ Ronald Lawler, Joseph Boyle, and William E. May have noted that, according to Pope John Paul II, our sexuality, "is 'by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such' [*Familiaris consortio*, #11]. In other words, being male or female is not simply an accidental or unimportant aspect of a human person, nor is it something whose significance is simply cultural. The sexuality of men and women affects them not only in obvious physical ways but also psychically, intellectually, and spiritually. Sexual differences make possible the complementary and special friendship between men and women – relationships that in a host of ways are connected to the economy of salvation: man and woman he made them; in his image he made them" (Lawler, Boyle, and May, *Catholic Sexual Ethics: A Summary, Explanation, and Defense*, second ed. [Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1998] 123). Again, although one's racial, ethnic, or cultural background is important, it is not, like human sexuality *is*, a modality which affects our entire being as persons, indeed, which makes possible the "nuptial" or "self-giving" meaning of sexuality.
- ³⁶ Cf. Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 455.
- ³⁷ Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 455.
- ³⁸ Grisez 342.
- ³⁹ Grisez 342. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, 1981, #40 on solidarity as a Christian virtue in the light of faith.

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- ⁴⁰ Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 456, emphasis added.
- ⁴¹ Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 456.
- ⁴² “Caste has been legally abolished in modern India, though attitudes based on it remain in many places.” Robert S. Ellwood, *Many Peoples, Many Faiths: An Introduction to the Religious Life of Humankind*, fourth ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N J: Prentice Hall, 1992).
- ⁴³ Cf. Grisez 431-440.
- ⁴⁴ For the “bad name” given to authority today, see Yves Simon, *A General Theory of Authority* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962, 1980) 13-22.
- ⁴⁵ For an interesting treatment of how authority is exercised and perceived in both the Church and American society, see the papers and discussion on them in Catholic Common Ground Initiative, *Church Authority and American Culture: The Second Cardinal Bernardin Conference* (N.Y.: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1999).
- ⁴⁶ Cf. Richard John Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992) 89-91.
- ⁴⁷ Cf. Simon 23-79.
- ⁴⁸ For a good treatment of authority and obedience, see Grisez 431-440.
- ⁴⁹ Grisez 432.
- ⁵⁰ Grisez 433.
- ⁵¹ Cf. Avery Dulles, “Criteria of Catholic Theology,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 22 (Summer 1995): 311.
- ⁵² Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 457. See also for a fuller discussion, Ashley, *Justice in the Church: Gender and Participation* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996) 17-21; 54-66.
- ⁵³ For a brief account of the self-determining aspect of free choice, see William E. May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, revised edition (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1994) 26-30.
- ⁵⁴ Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 457.
- ⁵⁵ Ashley 457.
- ⁵⁶ In fact, we have a *duty* to work not only for ourselves and our families, but also for the common good (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, #67). While the ancient and aristocratic attitude despised manual labor as servile, Ashley notes that “Jesus was known as ‘the carpenter’s son’ (Mt 13:55) and himself worked as a carpenter (Mk 6:3).” However, society also needs what Ashley calls a “contemplative class”: “a group of people freed from economic burdens to devote themselves to the pursuit of truth and the worship of God, a class that includes intellectuals, artists, writers, scientists, scholars, philosophers, and religious contemplatives” (Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love* 373-374, 374-375). Moreover, the *Catechism* teaches, following *Laborem exercens*, that by means of work, “the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature” (#2428). And for the Christian, work can also be “a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ” (#2427). For a good theological treatment of work, see William E. May, “Work, Theology of,” in Judith A. Dwyer (ed.), *New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought* 991-1002.

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- ⁵⁷ Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 1974, #70; Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 1989, #15-17 (on the secular character of the laity) and Part Three (on the coresponsibility of the laity in the mission of the Church).
- ⁵⁸ Ashley 457. Ashley notes that subsidiarity “applies to the retention of decision-making power at the local level (federalism). Functionalism applies to the retention of such power within functional groups such as professions, labor unions, industries, etc., rather than surrendering it to an omniscient state” (457).
- ⁵⁹ Michael Allsopp, “Subsidiarity, Principle of,” in Judith A. Dwyer (ed.), *New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought* 927.
- ⁶⁰ Ashley, *Theologies of the Body* 457. Cf. Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love* 343-344.
- ⁶¹ In 1996 Congress passed the welfare reform law. It requires states to cut welfare rolls in half by 2002. For a positive assessment of welfare reform, see Ron Haskins, “Welfare Reform is Working: For the Poor and Taxpayers Both,” *American Enterprise* 10 (January/February 1999): 62-65. For a negative assessment, see Colleen Carroll, “Behind the Good News of Shrinking Welfare Rolls,” *Our Sunday Visitor* (November 28, 1999), p. 3. For a more mixed assessment, see Mary Jo Bane, “Poverty, Welfare and the Role of Churches,” *America* (December 4, 1999): 8-11.
- ⁶² On this problem, see Novak 157-166.
- ⁶³ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s instruction, *Libertatis conscientia*, 1986 reminds us that “those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church...” (#68). For an interesting evaluation of faith-based organizations (FBOs), see Daniel P. Moloney, “‘Saving’ the Poor,” *First Things* (May 1999): 39-43. The Charitable Choice provision of the 1996 welfare reform act “requires state governments that receive federal block-grant welfare money to treat religious organizations just like any other private organization that receives such money, instead of discriminating against them simply because they involve religion” (39).
- ⁶⁴ Cf. Novak 147-168.
- ⁶⁵ For a sound treatment of the common good, see Grisez 339-347. See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1-2, Q. 90, a. 2, where Aquinas speaks of how law is to be directed to the *common good*.
- ⁶⁶ Grisez 345.
- ⁶⁷ Grisez 345.
- ⁶⁸ Grisez 346.
- ⁶⁹ Grisez 306.
- ⁷⁰ Grisez 307.
- ⁷¹ Grisez 307.
- ⁷² For a fuller examination of these characteristics, see the excellent treatment of them by Grisez 306-317. Cf. Ashley’s insightful treatment of the nature of Christian love, the works of love, and the sins against love in *Living the Truth in Love* 435-458.
- ⁷³ On the importance of the family (the “basic cell” of society) in Catholic social thought, see John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 1982, Part Three, Section Three; *Catechism* 2201-2233; and Schuck, *That They Be One*.

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- ⁷⁴ J. Brian Benestad, "Catholic Social Teaching, Political Philosophy, and Pope John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*," in Paul L. Williams (ed.), *Catholic Social Thought and the Teaching of John Paul II: Proceedings of the Fifth Convention of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars* (Pittstown, PA: Northeast Books, 1983) 59.
- ⁷⁵ The *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine* seem to express Benestad's threefold division when they state that the Church's social teaching "draws its origin from the encounter of the evangelical message and its ethical requirements with the problems that arise in the life of society." Continuing, the *Guidelines* note that this teaching "is projected onto the ethical aspects of life, without neglecting the technical aspects of the problems, in order to judge them with moral criteria. By basing itself 'on principles which are always valid,' it implies 'contingent judgments' since it develops in relation to the changeable circumstances of history, and is directed essentially toward 'Christian action or practice'" (#3, emphasis added).
- ⁷⁶ Carl Anderson, "Realistic Catechesis on the Family," in Russell E. Smith (ed.), *Faith and Challenges to the Family: Proceedings of the Thirteenth Workshop for Bishops* (Braintree, Massachusetts: Pope John Center, 1994) 294.
- ⁷⁷ For example, a distinctively Christian moral instruction will draw from the *natural law* ("a participation in God's wisdom and goodness by man....," *Catechism*, #1978), the *Old Law* (whose "moral prescriptions are summed up in the Ten Commandments," *Catechism*, #1980), and the *New Law* ("a law of love, a law of grace, a law of freedom," *Catechism*, #1985).
- ⁷⁸ Cf. Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (N.Y.: Free Press, 1991). For a sound discussion of rights, i.e., their kinds and their true and false foundations, see Ashley, *Living the Truth in Love* 275-282. See also Finnis 198-230.
- ⁷⁹ Cf. Anthony J. Ciorra and James Keating, *Moral Formation in the Parish* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1998) 115-145.
- ⁸⁰ Grisez 371, emphasis added.
- ⁸¹ Grisez 374.
- ⁸² Benestad 70.
- ⁸³ Benestad 68.
- ⁸⁴ Benestad 69.