

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

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The encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (RN) is considered the first great social encyclical of modern times. It was published by Pope Leo XIII on May 15, 1891, a landmark date in the history of the Church Magisterium. Forty years later, Pius XI commemorated it with the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (QA), and on the eightieth anniversary Paul VI issued his letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (OA). Finally, John Paul II commemorated the ninetieth anniversary with the most recent of the great social encyclicals, *Laborem Exercens* (LE).

These letters of the Roman Pontiffs are meant to awaken the consciences of Catholics to the fact that temporal affairs, whether politics, economics, science, art, labor, or international relations, have a moral dimension, which is God's law. Rather than diminishing our freedom to seek specific solutions to human problems, God's law serves as a guide for the building up of the earthly city according to the divine plan. The faithful need to know this moral dimension in order to apply it to social, political, and economic life, and thus sanctify the world and themselves through these secular realities.

I. The Social Doctrine of the Church

1. DEFINITION. The entire teaching of the ecclesiastical Magisterium which applies revealed truth and Christian moral principles to the social order is called the social doctrine of the Church. It applies the Gospel message to social reality. The purpose of the Church's social teaching is to present to men God's plan for secular reality. It enlightens men's minds with truth and guides them in building up the earthly city according to the divine plan.

We can distinguish two levels in the development of temporal activities. Sacred Scripture tells us that "God created man and left him in the hands of his own counsel. He gave him, besides, his commandments and precepts" (*Ecclus.* 15:14-16). On the one hand, God has given intelligence and freedom to man, thus opening the whole range of earthly realities to human opinions and options. This aspect of God's plan is what Vatican II called "the autonomy of earthly realities" (*Gaudium et Spes*--GS--36), or the autonomy of temporal affairs. This expression does not imply a gap in the divine plan; rather, this plan is to be fulfilled in the temporal sphere precisely by human initiative--the free play of opinions and options.

On the other hand, God has given to man "his commandments and precepts; that is, the natural law. This moral law, which man must fulfill, accompanies the autonomous sphere of temporal affairs--the ensemble of all those matters which fall outside the field of morality. These matters [occupy a very wide area. The social doctrine of the Church shows man the moral foundations of all these temporal realities.

By divine vocation, the Christian faithful have the mission of sanctifying temporal realities (*Lumen Gentium*--LG--30). By fulfilling the plan of God they are led to infuse truth and morality into civil society and to defend its just autonomy, thus avoiding clericalism. on the one hand. and laicism or secularism on the other.

2. THE MISSION OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL MAGISTERIUM The Church's mission belongs to the supernatural order (QA 41; *Mater et Magistra*--MM--1-5)- it does not interfere with legitimate temporal options nor support specific political programs (QA 41, 96). Nevertheless, the Church has a strict right--also a duty--to teach the moral aspects of the secular order, whether this be in politics, economics. or social matters (RN 12; QA 11, 41-43; MM 42). Likewise, she pronounces moral judgments upon temporal questions (MM 42; GS 76) and forms consciences in regard to temporal activities (MM 195).

The Church's social doctrine is an integral part of the Christian conception of life (MM 222); it is founded upon revelation and the natural law (RN 12; QA 11, 17; MM 219). Its contents are to be found mainly in the teachings of the popes and in other documents of the Church Magisterium. Among these, the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II merits special mention. Since it applies Christian truth and morality to various historical situations in the secular world, the social doctrine commands the assent of the faithful as much as any other pronouncements of the Magisterium.

Still, in order to interpret and apply that doctrine correctly, it is necessary to know the actual historical situation which a given document is evaluating. Its conclusions cannot be applied indiscriminately to different historical situations. Similar situations and facts warrant corresponding evaluations; somewhat different situations require appropriate modifications, even if they are described in the same terms. (The term "money," for example, used to mean exchange value; later it came to include capital, so that it is now licit to charge interest on money loaned.)

The Church's social doctrine ought to be known and taught by all the faithful (MM 224), who must also strive to address social problems in conformity with it (MM 225). This doctrine should be part of the education of young people, who must also form themselves in accord with its principles (MM 227). Since the Magisterium's teaching does not exhaust all possible moral questions which could arise in a civil society rightly oriented to Christian principles, the faithful need not wait to act until the Magisterium

provides them with a specific moral solution, So long as there is no official teaching on a particular matter, it belongs to the well-formed consciences of the faithful to determine what is and what is not in accord with Christian morality (GS 43). Therefore, the faithful have an obligation to study and become duly formed according to each one's ability and social position.

II. The Human Person

3. THE PERSONAL BEING OF MAN. The core of the Church's social doctrine is man's condition as a person. This means that he is an intelligent and free being made in God's image. That is, his being reflects the characteristically divine attributes of intellectual knowledge and love.

Though composed of body and soul, it is man's soul that makes him specifically human. Thus man acts and perfects himself as a person through knowledge and love. As the intellect is ordained to truth, the will moves toward the good; the human person is perfected in right actions by seeking truth and doing good. This signifies a fundamental law of human action that we call natural law. It is elevated by the law of grace.

4. THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON. The condition of being a person causes man to occupy a special place in the created universe. He is not a mere part of creation, indistinguishable from the rest; he controls it and takes care of it (LE 4, 5). At the same time, man is a being who is master of himself; before God he is a steward who must render an account of his work. Before other men he is an equal, a person, and he establishes with them relations of mutual understanding and love. This singular position and man's value as an image of God is what we mean when we speak 'of the dignity of the human person.

Creation by God is what gives man this dignity (RN 18; MM 214, 249). He is made in God's image. Rooted in his own nature, which is physical and spiritual (RN 4, 5; MM 208), is responsibility for his acts (MM 55), a capacity for self-mastery (MM 55), and intrinsic moral and religious requirements (MM 208). Man is intrinsically ordained by God to certain natural ends, and called to a further supernatural end. Thus the dignity of the human person ultimately resides in his ends or purposes.

By nature, man has as an intermediate end the cultivation, development, and perfection of all his faculties (QA 118), and as an ultimate end the knowledge and love of God (RN 15, 18, 30; QA 118; MM 214). This is the greatest perfection of his mind and will--his greatest perfection as a person. Because he is a spiritual being, man is open not just to limited goods but - to the absolute Good.

Elevation to the supernatural order brings to the human person his highest dignity (RN 18). Redeemed by Jesus Christ (RN 18), raised to the status of an adopted child of God

(RN 18; MM 219), and made a member of the Mystical Body of Christ (MM 258), each person is called to a supernatural final end (RN 15, 18, 30; QA 18; MM 214, 219), which is the loving vision of God.

5. THE PRINCIPLES OF EQUALITY AND OF FUNCTIONAL DIVERSITY. Because all men have the same nature, an essential or fundamental equality exists among them (RN 30; GS 29). This means that all men have equal worth and dignity, since each one is an image of God and, by grace, His child. The Church has always upheld this essential equality (MM 219, 220); the solidarity and brotherhood of all men and of all peoples is based upon it (RN 14, 30; MM 158). And by virtue of it, all men have the same basic rights (GS 29).

This essential equality does not keep accidental differences from occurring at the same time. While they do not affect human nature or its essential equality, God's providence makes use of them (RN 13) to bring about a diversity of functions in relation to the common good (RN 25). There are some things, certainly, which pertain to everyone, but many other things require a distribution of functions, a diversity of missions and of activities. In this way, human solidarity and the manifold richness of human nature are more evident. This diversity must not lead to discrimination with respect to fundamental rights, for these proceed from an essential equality (GS 29).

6. THE NATURAL RIGHTS OF THE HUMAN PERSON. One characteristic of the human person is self-mastery. This dominion has two aspects. First, control by reason and will over the other faculties makes a person's acts free and responsible; second, his being and the natural ends proper to it entitle the person to rights and liberties, as well as to duties, in his relations with others. These rights (and duties) are called natural rights (or fundamental rights--an expression much used by John XXIII) or inalienable rights of the human person (as John Paul II often calls them).

Usually these rights are stated in general terms; it then belongs to the interpreter to explain them more precisely. The main fundamental rights are as follows (MM 11-27; UN--Address of John Paul II to the 36th General Assembly of the United Nations, Oct. 2, 1979):

- 1) the right to life, liberty, and security of person;
- 2) the right to physical and moral integrity;
- 3) the right to sufficient and necessary means to live in a becoming manner (food, clothing, housing, rest, health care, social services);
- 4) the right to security in case of sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, unemployment, and any involuntary loss of the means of subsistence;

- 5) the right to due respect for one's person and good name;
- 6) the right to religious freedom and to freedom of conscience-and of thought:
- 7) the right to declare and defend one's own ideas (freedom of expression); the right to culture and access to objective information about public events;
- 8) the right to education and, in relation to it, freedom to teach;
- 9) the right to free choice of a state in life and the right to establish a family (marriage);
- 10) the right to work, to free choice of a position or profession, and to a just wage;
- 11) the right to private property, including ownership of the means of production (MM 96);
- 12) the right of assembly and of association;
- 13) the right to form unions and to strike (MM 14);
- 14) the right to choose one's residence, to travel, and to emigrate;
- 15) the right to participate actively in public life;
- 16) the right to personal participation in attaining the common good;
- 17) the right to the legal protection of one's rights;
- 18) the right to citizenship.

The rights given above are fundamental and inalienable in a general way, but they are not absolute. They must be seen in the context of the common good. They can cease to apply in specific cases when the common good is at stake (for example: freedom of expression ceases to be a right if it is used to express in public something contrary to the welfare of others--calumny, inciting to crime, justification of crime, etc.

III. Society

7. THE ORIGIN OF SOCIETY. Toward the end of the 18th century, a thesis which certain medieval jurists had expressed was more fully developed in the "social contract" theory. It became widespread in Europe and spread to areas of European influence. According to this theory, men are not social by nature, but began to exist as isolated individuals, each with a fullness of rights in himself. According to this theory, society arose later through a pact (a social contract), by which men agreed to come together in a political community.

Through this pact, men are said to have yielded up to society some part of their original rights; together, these would constitute the power of society. As a consequence, this social pact would be the origin of social authority. It follows immediately from this theory that social authority did not have a divine origin, that it did not proceed from God, and that in principle the whole ordering of society was merely human.

The social doctrine of the Church teaches, on the contrary, that God created man to live in society (RN 35; QA 83; MM 63; *Pacem in Terris*--PT--78), and that consequently God is the foundation of society itself. As man's Creator, God gave him the law of solidarity, which requires a social union that is both harmonious and organic (RN 13, 18; QA 90; MM 158, 159).

Man is ordained by this law of nature to live in society; only thus can he attain the full development of his personality (RN 35; QA 118; MM 60). Man naturally belongs to other men and is linked to them by a duty of love and solidarity. Even though historical forms of society also respond to cultural impulses of a human origin, their originating impulse is from nature and hence from God.

8. CIVIL AUTHORITY. Since the human community has a divine origin (in natural law), and since any society implicitly requires authority, it follows that civil authority also takes its origin from the natural law, which is to say, from God (RN 251; *Immortale Dei*--ID--10; PT 51). Therefore, the theory that the people are the ultimate source of power in civil society is incorrect (PT 78; *Ubi Arcano*--UA--22; see especially *Summi Pontificatus*--SP--*passim*). The divine origin of civil power is revealed in several passages of Sacred Scripture, among them Rom. 13:1-4 "Let everyone be subject to the higher authorities, for there exists no authority except from God, and those who exist have been appointed by God. Therefore he who resists the authority resists the ordinance of God...."

This does not mean that those who exercise this office receive their powers and faculties immediately from God (the so-called "divine right" theory). It does mean that the very existence of authority derives from God's disposition of things; that is, from natural right. Thus the divine origin of authority is compatible with the thesis that those who exercise power receive their authority immediately from the political community, whose office it is to determine forms of government, the manner of transmitting power, and the persons who shall exercise authority (PT 52, 74; GS 74).

Obedience and respect is due to civil authorities by virtue of the natural law (SP 71; UA 32; *Dignitatis Humanae*--DH--II). This precept engenders a serious obligation in conscience (*Diuoturnum Illud*--DI--9, 14; SP 71; UA 32). Obedience to civil authorities has as its basis the responsibility of each person, and because it is part of the order intended by God, it is an act of reverence and homage to the Creator (PT 50).

The duty of obedience to civil authority is not, however, unlimited, for authority itself is limited. These limits are determined by: a) the moral order and natural right; b) the common good; and c) the legitimately constituted legal order (GS 74). We must especially bear in mind that when human power commands something clearly opposed to the divine will--that is, to divine right, both natural and positive--that command is void (DI 11). In such a case, the just thing to do is not to obey it (*Libertas Praestantissimum--L--2l*), for it is an evident abuse of power.

The ultimate reason for authority is the common good (RN 26; PT 98), on which rests the legitimacy of its exercise (ID 2). Hence, if they deviate from the common good, the commands of those who exercise authority lose their obligatory force and constitute an abuse of power as well (SP 43; PT 47). This ultimate reason for authority further implies a duty to guarantee and protect the rights of all, especially of those who are least able to defend themselves (RN 27, 55).

When public authority exceeds its competence and oppresses the citizens, they must not turn away from the objective requirements of the common good, which may require them to put up with some evils. Nevertheless, they are permitted to defend their own rights and those of their fellow citizens against such abuses of authority, always within the bounds established by the natural law and the Gospel (GS 74).

9. THE COMMON GOOD. Civil society or the political community is not a mere collection of men, but is a true society, an organic unity. Like every society, the political community has as the fundamental principle of its existence the end toward which all must work together. This common end requires from everyone--authorities and citizens alike--an attitude of active cooperation toward the end proper to the political community. Since this end is common to all, it is called the common good.

The common good embraces the sum of those conditions of social life by which men are able to achieve the perfection proper to them with greater fullness and facility (DH 6). This means the totality of those conditions through which individuals, families, and associations are able to achieve their perfection more completely and more readily (GS 74). Above all, but not exclusively, the common good consists in respect for the rights and duties of the human person (DH 6). In our times, the common good is considered to rest principally upon the defense of those rights and duties (PT 60).

It is important to note that while the common good includes the production of goods and their protection, what is of principal concern to the common good is the just distribution of those goods among individuals, families (QA 58, 61; MM 73, 74, 112), the various sectors of society (MM 125, 127, 147, 150), and other nations (MM 153-160; see especially *Populorum Progressio--PP--passim*).

Material goods do not constitute the sole reason for the political community. While it is commonly held today that the purpose of civil society is confined to economic and social development, the Christian must be mindful that besides material goods, the common good also embraces the moral dimension of human life, and in a general way the needs of the spirit (PT 57-59). Among the different facets of the common good, the moral dimension holds first place (RN 25; MM 207, 208). Therefore, legislation which ignores moral considerations is profoundly opposed to the common good since it is degrading to society. Laws, then, must not only conform to morality, but also positively favor it.

The historical dimension of the common good must also be kept in mind. The correct requirements of the common good are intimately related to the social conditions prevailing at various times. Since these conditions are subject to constant change, the requirements of the common good change with them (GS 78). For example, the requirements of the common good are not the same in times of abundance and of scarcity.

The purpose of public administration is to direct and ordain all activities pertaining to the common good, to promote it, and to choose the best means to attain it. Not only does the common good legitimize public power; it is also the supreme law concerning the exercise of that power. But the public sector is not the only agency that secures the common good; since this is the very purpose of the entire political community, it is also the task of all citizens (RN 25; MM 96; PT 23; GS 73; OA 24). Everyone must be conscious of his responsibility for the common good. To reawaken this consciousness in everyone is an urgent task.

The responsibility of citizens for the common good has two aspects. One is the basic civic duty (it is binding in conscience) to take part in public life in accord with each one's possibilities (PT 74). The loss of this sense of duty is evident in apathy toward public affairs, nonvoting, misappropriation of public funds, negative criticism of authority, and selfishness in holding onto one's privileges at the expense of the general interest (Pius XII, *En ouvrant*, 10).

The other aspect is the citizen's responsibility, in so far as he is able, to make use of his goods--material and spiritual--and to act with social awareness, placing them at the service of the common good. This responsibility opens a wide range of cultural, beneficent, scientific, charitable, and sporting activities carried on with social awareness through the initiatives of citizens. This aspect is as much a duty as the previous one.

The social doctrine of the Church has particularly stressed the social function of property, since this is so often forgotten. To the extent that private possessions surpass the owner's need for a decent standard of living, they must be disposed for the service of others; that is, for the common good. Otherwise, the owner is guilty of an unjust use

of wealth. This principle, which is clearly rooted in the Gospel (the parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus), was especially emphasized by the Fathers of the Church and is a constant theme of Catholic writers.

10. THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY. As we have just seen, the common good is a task for public and private sectors of society, each functioning according to its nature. Some things fall within the competence of the public organization (the government) of the political community-as, for example, making laws, administering justice, and providing for the common defense. Other matters belong to private individuals; for example, whatever pertains to the family.

In addition, there is a broad range of activities in which both sectors, public and private, interact because the subject matter pertains to both for example, the production and distribution of goods, the promotion of scientific research and of the arts. Here the principle of the primacy of private initiative is to be strictly applied. In substance, this principle states that such activities belong in the first place to the individual person since they constitute part of his natural end. Consequently, they are the means by which a person perfects himself and cooperates in the perfecting of others.

The political community is ordained to the perfecting of persons; hence the public organization must not deprive persons of the means for their perfection and personal fulfillment. Far from restricting it, the government must assist them and empower them to act. The mission, of the state is to encourage, to assist, and when necessary to supplement the initiatives of its citizens. The social doctrine of the Church calls this the principle of subsidiarity (QA 80).

The most well-known formulation of this principle was given by Pius XI: "That most weighty principle, which cannot be set aside or changed, remains fixed and unshaken in social philosophy: 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 it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and 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 social body, and never destroy or absorb them" (QA 79).

Three other principles can be discerned within the principle of subsidiarity: First, persons and small communities must enjoy the autonomy necessary to attain the ends and to carry out the activities within their own competence. Second, larger communities must aid the initiatives of those who come under their authority, neither stifling nor absorbing them. Third, the larger society must supply the deficiencies of persons and smaller communities when they are unable by themselves to promote the common good, and for so long as the deficiency should last.

Two conditions must be met for this principle to be applied correctly: First, the private enterprise must have social significance; that is, it must be carried out with a consciousness of social responsibility.

Second, the state must not act to the detriment of the defenseless (QA 78; MM 11), and it must guarantee and assist private enterprises.

11. LEGISLATION. Laws are norms of obligatory action by which the organization of the political community is regulated and each of its members is assigned the role which belongs to him in terms of the common good. The fulfillment of the laws pertains to that part of justice which is called "legal justice."

The fundamental structure of society and the basic principles of human conduct arise from the eternal law, which is the divine reason as it governs the entire universe (L 6). The eternal law is called natural law or natural right (L 6) in view of man's participation in it, as it has been impressed upon the hearts of all men (Rom. 2:14-15). Natural right is engraved in human nature (PT 63); it contains the dictates of man's reason which command him to do what is by nature good for him and prohibit him from doing what is bad. Although the terms are often used synonymously, "natural right" is that part of natural law which refers to human relationships.

The precepts of the natural law are not simply a moral guide or an ideal which ought to be attained. They constitute the very core of the legal order, the standard by which the positive laws made by man are to be interpreted, and the norm of their validity in conscience (RN 35; *Mit brennender Sorge*--MBS--35). The natural law is the common patrimony of humanity and obliges everyone (L 18). It is the universal law given to all men without any distinction.

The natural law regulates only the moral center of human life; besides God's commands and precepts, He has bestowed upon man the capacity for self-government. Therefore, society has the power (founded on the natural law) to make laws. These are called positive laws or positive right. The function of positive law is to regulate social relations, completing the social order in those matters about which nature is silent (Pius XII, // *programma* 16). The same principles that apply to civil authority also apply to positive laws, since they are exercises of that power.

IV. Marriage and the Family

12. THE FAMILY. Both individualism and collectivism affirm that the political community is no different from many other associations which are composed of an aggregate of human persons considered as single individuals. Accordingly, the political community would be made up of individuals and lack intermediate social bodies or strata. The social doctrine of the Church considers this thesis to be erroneous. When he was

created by God as an "end-oriented being" (i.e., directed to natural ends), man was ordained to those ends in a social manner by means of bonds that are prior to and distinct from those proper to the political community. Thus the state is not simply a conventional society (the result of a compact) limited to the defense of individual rights and interests (the argument of individualist liberalism); nor does it embrace within itself the whole social dimension of human life (the argument of collectivist totalitarianism).

While the political community represents only one dimension of man's sociability, it is the highest expression of that sociability since it pertains to the common good (previously described). Hence the political community brings together men who are already grouped into social bodies. Men approach that community both individually, as private citizens, and as persons joined by social bonds in communities, business undertakings, and other social bodies.

The most fundamental and the most important of those communities is the family, the community of parents and children. When God created man and bestowed upon him the benefits of work (lordship and dominion over the earth), He had in mind not individuals but the union of male and female. This union itself receives the benefits of creation, together with the propagation of the human race (Gen. 1:27-28; LE 4). This means that the family is the primary social structure of mankind, the basic cell of society (QA 2). Just as the human body is composed of its members, so the political community is composed of persons and families (*Casti Connubii*--CC--37).

Upon his birth, a man is brought into the community of life his parents have formed, to be raised and educated by them. Consequently, since every man is the offspring of marriage, the natural union of male and female, the family is the first manifestation and the root of human sociability. As a human person, the specific acts by which a man carries out his nature are knowledge and love. Thus the deepest meaning of human sociability is not simply common action but the social relation of knowing and loving others as persons at the same time that one is known and loved by them. Since this is so, a man is the offspring of the engendering act of a father and mother who know and love each other as marriage partners. And at the same time he finds in union with them, and with the family as a whole, the most natural and the most basic experience of sociability as reciprocal knowledge and love (*Familiaris Consortio*--FC--18, 21). The family, founded upon marriage, is therefore the fundamental nucleus of human sociability, the means provided by nature itself for personal development and mutual assistance.

13. MARRIAGE. What begins and establishes the family, and therefore the human community, is marriage (CC 1). In marriage, male and female form "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24; cf. GS 48) by means of a bond which joins their souls (a duty of mutual love) and their bodies (a right to the acts proper to conjugal life). Male and female unite in

marriage through a free act of mutual self-giving which is by its nature irrevocable (GS 48). The essential ends and properties of marriage proceed from its author, God Himself (GS 48); thus the institution of marriage exists-by natural law. The marriage contract gives rise to the intimate community of life and love which belongs to marriage (GS 48). Although this contract proceeds from mutual consent, the marriage bond pertains to natural law because the consent only actualizes a potentiality given to nature when it was created (CC 6). Therefore, on the basis of mutual consent, the marriage bond is established by natural law; that is, by God Himself (*Matt. 19:6*). It follows that marriage is indissoluble. And since God made of the two, the male and the female, one flesh, marriage is also monogamous--that is, a union of one man and one woman.

Genesis tells us that when God created man, He created them male and female, blessed them, and commanded them to "increase and multiply." That primordial blessing indicates why there is a difference between male and female and the reason for their union; the original expression of human sociability is the generation and education of offspring. In other words, the very institution of marriage and conjugal love are ordained by nature to the procreation and education of offspring (GS 48). Marriage provides husband and wife with the means to live conjugal chastity and mutual help (its personal, or secondary ends); these are to be placed, according to the order of nature, at the disposition of the primordial command. This rule has found expression as the "subordination" of the personal ends to the primary end of procreation and education of offspring (Pius XII, Discourse of Oct. 29, 1951, 31 ff.).

One can infer from this that an anti-procreative or contraceptive attitude would imply a grave alteration of the order of conjugal life, which it degrades and corrupts. This matter cannot be reduced to a question of methods; any method which proceeds from a contraceptive mentality is wrong (at least by reason of the end in view), even if it only makes use of infertile periods (Pius XII, Discourse of Oct. 29, 1951, 23). In other words, regardless of the method, the contraceptive mentality is always wrong--morally evil. Quite distinct--both morally and humanly--is the attitude of those who sincerely accept the fruitfulness of marriage but for objectively just reasons (medical, eugenic, financial, or social) are advised not to have more children--either for a time or permanently. In such cases it is permissible to make use of infertile periods or periodic continence (FC 32)--but no other methods--and there may be good reason to advise complete continence.

14. THE POPULATION PROBLEM. Closely related to marriage is the so-called population problem--the increase of population to levels which might be regarded as harmful from economic and social points of view. Concerning this question, the social doctrine of the Church has adopted a posture which is both realistic and confident in divine providence. She realizes that there are overpopulated areas which suffer from hunger and real difficulties, especially in lesser developed countries (MM 190). But such

difficulties can be traced to defective economic structures and the lack of solidarity among peoples (MM 190, 198). Viewing this matter in the context of the entire world, she sees that God has placed enough goods at man's disposition, and the ability to increase them (MM 188, 189, 199).

In order to overcome this problem in areas where it exists, true and just solutions must be employed: economic development and social progress (MM 189, 191, 192, 196, 197); cooperation among peoples (MM 192; PP passim.); recognition that human life is sacred (MM 194) and that divine laws must be respected (MM 189, 191, 193); education of youth in the establishment of their own families (MM 195). Aside from other considerations, it is highly unjust for countries to spend enormous amounts in the arms race and to orient technology toward ever more powerful weapons when resources are lacking to feed and provide a worthy life for all men (MM ;90).

15. RIGHTS OF THE FAMILY. The situation many families face in different countries is most problematic and even openly destructive. Institutions and laws fail to recognize the inviolable rights of the person and of the family; instead of serving the family, society violently attacks its values and its basic needs. Therefore, on various occasions the Church has recalled the rights of the human person in connection with the family, or simply, the rights of the family (FC 46):

- 1) the right of every man to found a family and to obtain the resources needed to maintain it;
- 2) the right to exercise one's responsibility in the transmission of life;
- 3) the right to the intimacy of conjugal and family life;
- 4) the right to a marriage which is one and indissoluble;
- 5) the right to believe, profess, and propagate one's faith;
- 6) the right to educate offspring in accord with one's traditions, religious and cultural values, by means of the necessary instruments, methods, and institutions;
- 7) the right to the physical, social, political, and financial security of the family;
- 8) the right to housing which is adequate for a worthy family life;
- 9) the right of expression and of representation in dealing with public, economic, social, and cultural authorities and their subordinate agencies-both individually and in association;
- 10) the right to form associations with other families and institutions, more adequately to fulfill the mission of the family;

- 11) the right to protect minors, by means of appropriate institutions and laws, from dangerous drugs, pornography, alcoholism. etc.;
- 12) the right to a just amount of leisure time in order to foster the values of the family;
- 13) the right of the elderly to live and to die in a worthy manner;
- 14) the right to emigrate as a family in order to seek better living conditions.

V. Education

16. RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF PARENTS. The one primary end of marriage has two facets: procreation and the education of offspring. These form a single end because education is an extension of generation; the ultimate end of marriage is the "educated child" (RN 9; CC 12). **Through generation the parents form the child's body (the soul having been created by God); through education they form him spiritually. In natural law, the parents are the source of life and the source of education for life (*Divini illius Magistri*--DIM--25, 26).**

Parents have the mission--the grave duty (DIM 29; *Gravissimum Educationis*--GE--3)--and the right (which others must recognize) to educate their children. For that reason, it is a fundamental right of parents to see that their children are educated in accordance with their religious and moral convictions (FC 46). This right of parents (and by extension, of the family) cannot be set aside, and it takes precedence to any right of society and of the state; therefore, it is inviolable (DIM 27, 30).

The right which we have just set forth requires respect for the educational dimension of family life, the atmosphere within which a child receives this important educational influence (DIM 55). It further entails the right of parents to choose schools for their children (GE 6) and to set up and maintain educational institutions which are in accord with their convictions.

17. FREEDOM TO TEACH. The principle underlying the legal order with respect to instruction and education is the freedom to teach. Instruction and education presuppose the transmission of knowledge and formation in the virtues. This being so, the proper subject of knowledge and of moral action is not the state but the human person. Consequently, teaching and educational roles belong to persons. Instruction is a mission proper to personal initiative; as a result, the fundamental right to establish and to operate educational centers at all levels belongs to the person.

In keeping with this principle, the state's mission is: to regulate educational matters in conformity with the principle of the freedom to teach; to guarantee the rights of parents and of educational institutions; to guard the right of all citizens to education; and to establish educational institutions in the absence of private initiatives (DIM 36-38; GE 6).

An "educational monopoly" would be opposed to the innate rights of man, whether it meant "only one school system" or "one standard textbook" (GE 6).

18. THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION. Since all men of every race, condition, and age possess human dignity, they have an inalienable right to an education in keeping with each one's purpose, gender, particular characteristics, and whatever belongs to their national culture and traditions. The purpose of education is the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and for the welfare of the societies (civil, religious, international) which he belongs to and whose obligations he must share (GE 1). Education is not complete if it does not embrace the religious and moral dimensions of personality (DIM 30, 31).

Since education is the natural right of every person, it is an obligation of private initiative to take actions which will develop instruction and learning so that no one is overlooked. For the same reason, it is a duty of the state and of competent public agencies to assist parents and private citizens with initiatives that effectively bring teaching and learning within the reach of everyone (DIM 37; GE 1). The state must also supplement the initiatives of families and private citizens when they are unable to carry out their educational mission or neglect their duties in this regard (DIM 38).

The state's role in teaching and education can be summarized as follows: to guarantee, to protect, to encourage, and to supplement (DIM 38, 66; GE 6).

VI. The Socio-Economic Order

19. THE SOCIAL QUESTION. The appearance in the 19th century "proletarian" class of impoverished workers brought with it what came, to be called the "social question." Although it has lost most of its initial virulence in many places, certain unresolved aspects of the social question continue to persist. Originally its primary concern was with flagrant injustices suffered by wage laborers: very meagre income, serious lack of protection, job insecurity, etc. At the basis of this situation was a prevalent individualistic liberalism which took a commercial attitude toward work and subjected it to the law of supply and demand. At the same time, intermediate agencies such as guilds and other worker organizations were abolished by the champions of "freedom of contract," and workers were left without means of bargaining with their employers.

From the outset, it was suspected that the root of the social question went deeper than the economic situation of laborers. While the birth of the industrial age (the "Industrial Revolution") gave fresh insight into the production of goods, it also brought about a "new socio-economic order" which emphasized the changed relationship of productive labor to ownership of the means of production ("capital") and distribution of the goods produced. Theoretical and practical attempts to resolve the resulting problems for

workers led to a new conception of the economic and social order which was "revolutionary" by liberal-bourgeois standards.

Basically these attempts reversed the liberal priorities; now the sociopolitical order would be founded on work and public ownership of the means of production. A "class struggle," originally understood as the means to achieve this objective, was expanded by Marxism into the leading principle of human history. The combination of these theories, all seeking to replace individualism with collectivism (a view of man as entirely social), received the generic name "socialism." The first stage in its development, which Marx called "utopian socialism," was followed by his own "scientific theory" of man and his historical development--a political, economic, and social theory and praxis in the larger context of a materialistic and atheistic view of man and the world.

These opposed positions, both contrary to the principles of the divine law, form the background of the Church's social doctrine, which first pointed out the fundamental errors of individualistic liberalism (also referred to as "capitalism," in view of the primacy it gave to capital) and of collectivist socialism, and then went on to provide an overall orientation for the resolution of the social question.

In time, these doctrines have shifted with changing social conditions. Liberalism has given rise to several economic systems, all preserving the essential features of capitalism, some of them more moderate and others occasioning new injustices. Socialism, too, has experienced internal divisions: communism, socialism, social democracy, neo-Marxism, Eurocommunism, Maoism. In some cases its earlier principles have been reformed, but the Marxist varieties still retain atheistic and anti-Christian foundations.

Although the condition of wage laborers remains distressing in some places, elsewhere the majority have made strides toward improved living conditions and have attained a measure of equality within the civic body. There have even appeared "affluent societies" in which unchecked consumerism has accompanied a decline of moral values. The Magisterium of the Church has kept pace with these developments in its treatment of various questions, emphasizing in each case the moral criteria which need to be applied to different situations, and calling attention to the dominant thrust of the socio-economic order.

The Church's doctrine concerning socio-economic questions does not constitute a final theory or a complete body of doctrine relative to the production of goods, ownership of the means of production, and distribution of finished products. Neither does it contain specific political programs. Both of these fall within the province of philosophers and politicians.

Like the reality it deals with, the Church's social doctrine is quite complex; what follows will only touch on some of its principles.

20. THE DIGNITY OF WORK. It is God's will that man should engage in work, an activity which encompasses all those human efforts which aim at improved conditions of life (or better still, the process by which man understands, cares for, superintends, and transforms the earth and its resources) (GS 3). When he was created in the image and likeness of God, man received the command to rule the world, subduing the earth and all it contains (GS 34), thus continuing and cooperating in the creative work of God (LE 4). In accord with the distinction commonly made between labor and capital, the Church's social doctrine often gives to work the rather precise meaning of a transitive action which terminates in an object--the production of goods (LE 4).

As a human activity, work must correspond to the dignity of man (RN 32; MM 18, 92). It comes immediately from a person, who places his stamp upon the raw material and makes it conform to his will (GS 67), thereby ennobling it (LE 9). Through his work, man not only transforms nature but perfects it (QA 135; MM 82, 149, 255). The worker realizes himself as a man and in a certain sense "becomes more human" (LE 9). All of this shows why it is necessary for the social order to permit the worker to perfect himself, not to degrade him and diminish his dignity (LE 9).

21. THE PURPOSE OF WORK. Work is the fulfillment of man's vocation (MM 149, 256), his means of subsistence (RN 6; QA 61; GS 67), the way he relates to other men, whom he serves (GS 67), and his path to holiness (LG 41). Through their labor, men are associated with Christ in His redemptive work. As a consequence, every man has a duty as well as a right to work (GS 67).

22. THE DUTY TO WORK. Everyone is obligated to work (RN 13)--whether it is the only means of self-support (RN 6; QA 61) or not (RN 13)--for work is the ordinary instrument of personal perfection and a necessary means to attain the common good, to which all are obliged to contribute (RN 8, 14; QA 135).

23. THE RIGHT TO WORK. The correct ordering of social life implies that all have a right to work; this means resolving the problem of unemployment and layoffs (LE 18). Fulfillment of this right is the primary responsibility of each individual and of private initiative (MM 44), for the creation of jobs is a social function of great importance (QA 51). As indirect employer, the state has a supplementary role (LE 17, 18), part of its vigilance for the common good (MM 44); one of the fundamental elements of the social order is the opportunity for all men to find employment (QA 74; MM 79). The avoidance of work stoppages has to be one of the state's most serious concerns (RN 40; MM 54).

The methods the state must use in resolving the unemployment problem are generally indirect--establishing a correct social policy and promoting economic development in all

sectors (MM 52-55, 150, 151). Nevertheless, should it be necessary, the state must itself provide jobs (RN 29; MM 44) and guarantee the means of subsistence to those who are involuntarily out of work. This may even justify nationalizing certain means of production if conditions require it (LE 14).

Solving the unemployment problem requires the cooperation of all those concerned, both at the national and at the international level. It is a fact of great significance that a disproportion exists between areas where large supplies of natural resources lie undeveloped and other areas where whole groups are unemployed or underemployed and large numbers are starving. This is evidence of incorrect solutions of continental and even global proportions in matters of critical social importance (LE 18).

24. THE PRIMACY OF LABOR. Human work that is engaged in production, trade and services is prior to other elements of economic life which only serve an instrumental role (GS 67). Capital occupies a place among these instrumental means; the relation between labor and capital must therefore be regulated by the principle of the "primacy of labor" (or the priority of "labor" to "capital") (LE 12). This principle refers directly to the very production process, wherein "labor" (the work force) is the primary subject and efficient cause, while "capital" is only a means of production or instrumental cause. This means that the production process must be so regulated that primacy is given to the working man rather than placing him in the service of capital.

From another point of view, capital (or the means of production as a whole may be seen as the historic patrimony which has resulted from labor (LE 12). It would thus be false to argue "dialectically" about a "struggle" between labor and capital. A just system of work, one which is intrinsically true and morally legitimate, would fundamentally overcome this opposition between labor and capital (LE 13). That result will occur when the worker not only receives due recompense but also realizes that he is actually doing "his own thing.; that he is truly an autonomous subject engaged in a deeply personal process (LE 15).

Those who associate together in economic undertakings are persons--men who are free and independent, created in the image of God. Therefore, while taking into account the diverse functions of each element (owners, managers, technicians, workers) within the overall unity provided by executive decision, everyone's active participation in the whole enterprise can take any number of forms. In many cases it is not within the firm itself but at higher levels of organization that economic and social decisions are reached; workers must also participate in those decisions, either on their own or through freely elected representatives (GS 68).

25. OWNERSHIP OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION. Against the denial of the right of ownership which has been and is still found in certain tendencies of socialism, the social doctrine of the Church has constantly reaffirmed this natural right, with respect both to

goods that are used in consumption and in production (RN 6, 7; QA 44; MM 109-115). It follows, as well that economic life ought to be principally a concern of private initiative (MM 51).

26. UNIVERSAL DISTRIBUTION OF GOODS. The ecclesiastical Magisterium has also affirmed, however, and no less firmly, that private property has a social function (or, in the words of John Paul II, is leased to society); that is, goods are intended for a "common use" and consequently must reach everyone (RN 6; QA 45; MM 43). God intended the earth and its contents to be useful to all men and all nations. Consequently, created goods must be equally accessible to everyone; this is a matter of justice and of charity. Whatever the forms of ownership which diverse and varying circumstances may prescribe as legitimate institutions in different nations, this universal distribution of goods must never be lost sight of. Therefore, in making use of these goods, men must not regard as exclusively their own the external things they legitimately possess; in the sense that these goods also have advantages for others, they are common as well (GS 69).

As a result, the state must respect and defend the right of ownership, and prevent injustices from being committed against it (RN 28), while at the same time requiring property to fulfill its social function (QA 49)

27. PUBLIC OWNERSHIP. Respect for and defense of private ownership does not exclude the legitimacy of public ownership of certain means of production. The position of rigid capitalism is wrong in maintaining that the exclusive right to private ownership of the means of production is an unassailable dogma of economic life (LE 14)

The basic principles which govern this subject can be summarized as follows: a) Government or public corporations are subsidiary to private firms (MM 117); b) Public ownership is justified when the goods in question entail such great economic power that in private hands they would pose a threat to the common good (QA 114; MM 116); c) Since the obligations of public agencies tend to increase, it is normal for the scope of public ownership to be enlarged (MM 117), but the principle of subsidiarity must always be observed, lest public ownership be extended beyond the true and manifest needs of the common good to the point that private ownership is diminished or suspended (MM 117).

28. SOCIALIZATION. If we understand by "socialization" the active participation in management of all who form a part of public and private corporations, it is surely desirable (MM 91-93; LE 14). Therefore, proposals for joint ownership of the workplace, profit sharing, shareholding by workers, and similar features are laudable.

This type of socialization is not achieved by outright elimination of private ownership of the means of production, for the simple conversion of those means from private to

public would only cause their monopolistic administration and disposition to change hands. Socialization, then, is not the same as expropriation or nationalization; it simply puts into practice the principle of the primacy of labor (LE 14).

For socialization understood as nationalization, see section 27.

29. WAGES. Work provides for the sustenance of persons. This principle must be considered at several levels: Universally, work provides for the sustenance of all mankind; in the life of a nation, it provides the resources of those who make up the political community; at the most elementary level, it provides for the maintenance of families and individuals. This means that the outcome of the entire productive process must extend to all men--to those who are considered "unproductive" as well as to those who are actively employed--by means of a correct system of distribution. This distribution of goods normally occurs through two complementary systems: wages and various social benefits. Of these, the first one--just remuneration for work done--is the more important since it is a specific means for distributing goods.

Work is not a piece of merchandise to be subjected to the law of supply and demand, as liberalism used to affirm (RN 1, 32; QA 107, 109, 110; MM 11, 12). Nor is it the only source of economic value, as Marxism holds (QA 55, 68). Hence the just distribution of a firm's profits between capital and labor is of prime importance (QA 53-58). Wage rates must therefore be fixed in relation to the condition of a firm (QA 72). On the other hand, since work is the means whereby persons support themselves and their dependents, the wage must take into account both the employee's personal needs and those of his family (QA 71; LE 19).

Finally, wage rates must reflect the economic life of the political community for they have an important bearing upon the common good (QA 74). This principle prohibits privileged groups (MM 79) and excessive remuneration for tasks of little consequence (MM 70). An effort must be made to employ the largest possible number (QA 78; MM 79) and to maintain a favorable balance between wages and prices (QA 75; MM 79). This dimension of the common good must be considered not only within a given country, but also internationally (MM 80).

The amount of each wage must also take into account the worker's contribution to the enterprise (QA 57, 58; MM 71) and his personal productivity (RN 13; MM 70).

30. SOCIAL BENEFITS. A firm's financial condition might often prevent the payment of a wage sufficient to meet the level of life to which a worker and his family are entitled in view of the contribution his work makes to the whole community. When this occurs, the wage must be supplemented by various social benefits which serve as alternate means of distributing profits (LE 19). In this matter, the basic criterion is satisfaction of the fundamental rights previously indicated, in proportion to the sum total of goods

produced within that political community and, insofar as possible, within the international community.

VII. Conclusion

The principles of the social doctrine of the Church--of which only a brief panoramic view has been given here--are to serve the Catholic faithful as a secure guide in their mission of sanctifying the world. These principles set forth the fundamental directions for action which will enable the salt and the light of the Christian faith to render the earthly city fruitful and to make the saving Cross of Christ shine forth within it.

References

- CC -- *Casti Connubii*, encyclical of Pius XI (1930)
- DH -- *Dignitatis Humanae*, declaration of Vatican II (1965)
- DI -- *Diuturnum Illud*, encyclical of Leo XIII (1881)
- DIM - *Divini Illius Magistri*, encyclical of Pius XI (1929)
- FC -- *Familiaris Consortio*, apostolic exhortation of John Paul II (1981)
- GE -- *Gravissimum Educationis*, declaration of Vatican II (1965)
- GS -- *Gaudium et Spes*, constitution of Vatican II (1965)
- ID -- *Immortale Dei*, encyclical of Leo XIII (1885)
- L -- *Libertas Praestantissimum*, encyclical of Leo XIII (1888)
- LE -- *Laborem Exercens*, encyclical of John Paul II (1981)
- LG -- *Lumen Gentium*, constitution of Vatican II (1964)
- MBS - *Mit brennender Sorge*, encyclical of Pius XI (1937)
- MM -- *Mater et Magistra*, encyclical of John XXIII (1961)
- OA -- *Octogesima Adveniens*, letter of Paul VI (1971)
- ONU - Address to the 26th General Assembly of the United Nations by John Paul II (Oct. 2, 1979)
- PP -- *Populorum Progressio*, encyclical of Paul VI (1967)
- PT -- *Pacem in Terris*, encyclical of John XXIII (1963)
- QA -- *Quadragesimo Anno*, encyclical of Pius XI (1931)
- RN -- *Rerum Novarum*, encyclical of Leo XIII (1891)
- SP -- *Summi Pontificatus*, encyclical of Pius XII (1939)
- UA -- *Ubi Arcano*, encyclical of Pius XI (1922)

More recent encyclicals of the social magisterium include

- Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* ``On Social Concerns" (1988)
- Centissimus Annus* ``On the Hundredth Anniversary [of *Rerum Novarum*]" (1991)
- Evangelium Vitae* ``The Gospel of Life" (1995)

Documents of Church Councils [[Hyperlink removed](#)]

Some Papal encyclicals [Hyperlink removed]

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