

ON RELATIVE EQUALITY: CATHOLIC EGALITARIANISM AFTER VATICAN II

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IN APRIL 1983 the Roman Catholic Church quietly observed the twentieth anniversary of the publication of Pope John XXIII's encyclical letter *Pacem in terris*. After the convocation of the Second Vatican Council, *Pacem in terris* stands as the greatest achievement of John's short time as pope. Just as the Council broke with the past by choosing a pastoral approach to the questions of the day, listening to the aspirations of men and women of every condition and offering them a word of hope in the gospel, so *Pacem in terris* turned its back on the hardened doctrine of the past and found hope and moral direction in the great movements of the day: the independence of nations, the emancipation of women, the struggle for rights and constitutional government, and the global demand for nuclear disarmament. In these "signs of the times" John saw the Spirit of God at work in our own day, and in the principles and ideals of these movements, as seen through the lens of the gospel, he found norms for the guidance of modern political and social life.¹

Discernment of the signs of the times was one of the singular contributions of John's pontificate to modern Roman Catholic social ethics. This paper presents an interpretative reading of the development of Roman Catholic social teaching in economic matters over the past two decades.² My contention will be that during that time magisterial teach-

¹ On signs of the times, see *Peace on Earth (Pacem in terris)* in David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Renewing the Earth* (Garden City: Doubleday/Image, 1977) 117-70, esp. nos. 39-45, 75-79, 126-29. For other references see in the same volume the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 4; *Development of Peoples*, no. 13; *Justice in the World*, Introduction. For an authoritative reading of the method of reading the signs of the times, see Maurice Cardinal Roy, "Letter on the Tenth Anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*" in Joseph Gremillion, ed., *Gospel of Peace and Justice* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976) 531-67, esp. nos. 147-58.

² This paper was first presented as the 1983 Pope John XXIII Lecture at the University of the Pacific, Stockton, Calif., under the title "I Wish You Well . . . : Reagan's Economics and Human Solidarity." It was later discussed at a faculty colloquium at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley and presented in revised form at the annual meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics, Philadelphia, Pa., January 1984, and to the Equality and Justice Project of the Center for Ethics and Social Policy of the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Calif., under a grant from the California Council on the Humanities. I am grateful to all the sponsors and discussants, but particularly to Prof. James Heffernan and Dr. Virgil Giannelli, M.D., of the University of the Pacific, and to Professor Henry Clark of the University of Southern California, my SCE respondent.

ing on economic justice has become increasingly egalitarian. One fundamental reason for this shift, I hope to show, is the sociohistorical method of discerning the signs of the times. This methodological shift in magisterial teaching led, during Vatican II and the pontificate of Paul VI, to increasingly critical evaluations of existing economic and political institutions for their failure to bring out a more just and equitable world. As a result, the complex system of norms of distributive justice which make up Catholic social teaching on economic life gained greater focus and integration around a norm of solidaristic equality than at any time since the Middle Ages.³ The second major factor leading to the development of Catholic social teaching was the introduction of the theological conception of human solidarity by Vatican II and Pope Paul VI.

The heart of this renewed economic teaching is what I shall call the principle of relative equality. This is the idea that wealth and resources ought to be regularly redistributed to redress the differences between groups, sectors, and even nations.⁴ The precedent for relative equality as a norm of distributive justice may be found in John XXIII's description of the common good in number 79 of *Mater et magistra*. There John wrote that among the considerations making up the material common good were "to make accessible the goods and services for a better life to as many persons as possible; either to eliminate or hold within bounds the inequalities that exist between different sectors of the economy; to balance properly any increase in output with advances in services provided to citizens, especially by public authority." Here already may be found important egalitarian distributive principles. There is insistence on correcting economic inequalities and on distributing the goods made possible by increased production and regulating economic developments towards an inclusive sharing in a common quality of life. Along with the

³ The latest formulation of the pluralistic theory of economic justice in mid-twentieth-century Catholicism is found in John XXIII's *Mater et magistra* (*Christianity and Social Progress*, 1961), though even this document points to many later changes (e.g., the common good, social responsibility of property, worker participation). See *Renewing the Earth* 44–116. Henceforth all references to magisterial documents will be to *Renewing the Earth*, unless otherwise specified. On the solidaristic character of medieval society and medieval Catholic social ethics, see Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1960) 246–56, esp. 254–56. Among contemporary philosophical ethicists, two efforts at building systems of pluralistic (proportional) systems of justice stand out: William Galston, *Justice and the Human Good* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), and Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

⁴ Though I first employed the term "relative equality" independently, the term is utilized also by Amy Gutman in her *Liberal Equality* (New York: Cambridge University, 1980) 190–91, and more extensively in Douglas Rae et al., *Equalities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1981) 104–9.

consistent requirement of the common good that every group look to the well-being of others, John provided an egalitarian momentum for modern Catholic social teaching by redefining the content of the common good in distributional terms.

It was not John XXIII's natural-law social philosophy but the renewal of natural law through theological sources in the Council and during the pontificate of Paul VI that made egalitarian distribution a cardinal principle of magisterial social ethics. The method of signs of the times provided a theological perspective for social analysis in which inequality emerged as the major social problem of modern times, and the affirmation of human solidarity provided the theological warrants for an egalitarian social order. This combination of a new method with the rediscovery of patristic social theology led to a reconceptualization of the social teaching along egalitarian lines. There is a unity and focus to postconciliar social teaching which can only be appreciated if solidaristic equality is seen to lie at the center of the teaching. Relative equality is the normative, distributive principle which articulates how solidaristic equality is to be realized in a social system. Regular redistribution to redress differences between groups is necessary to preserve and foster human community.

Roman Catholic social teaching of the last twenty years may be characterized, then, as a *strong* sort of egalitarianism. Of course, such characterizations are only approximate. But, in general, strong forms of equality do two things. First, they tend to require economic and social institutions which attempt to approximate equal allocation of resources as a norm. By comparison, weak theories of equality tend to allow more room for competing principles of justice (e.g., inherited rights, contract, or utility), to permit more exceptions in the name of the general welfare or special interests, and require less in the way of institutional support and readjustment to realize the equality of persons in society, stressing equality of opportunity and formal procedural justice. Secondly, strong forms of equality tend to require more in the way of substantial redistribution of material goods, establishing guaranteed welfare floors, socio-economic rights and the like, than the weaker conceptions. In other words, strong forms of egalitarianism tend to hold that justice requires redistribution of wealth from rich to poor towards a mean.

Allow me a further word about the term "relative equality." The adjective "relative" is a qualifier. It indicates that the kind of equality aimed at is not an absolute or leveling sort of equality in which everyone gets the same benefits and shares the same burdens. Rather, *it points to a situation in which inequalities are held within a defined range set by moral limits*. Within that range, differences of income etc. are determined by the interplay of a variety of norms: need, contribution, hardship, the common good. But *limits are set on the permissible differences by the*

cardinal norm of communitarian equality with its aim of sustaining and enhancing the bonds uniting people to one another. In the Catholic context, the ultimate goal of this norm is that men and women treat one another as brothers and sisters, and the restriction it places on other norms is that they should not diminish the possibility for such treatment.

The chief consequences of relative equality with respect to the body of Catholic social teaching are three. First, as a result of weakened confidence in voluntary adherence to the principles of distributive justice, there has been a progressive qualification and criticism of earlier notions of the right to private property, including the right to private ownership of the means of production. Secondly, there has been a corresponding emphasis on government intervention as the principal means of correcting the "imbalances" created by the free play of market forces and the uncontrolled advancement of technology. Thirdly, there has re-emerged a communitarian ideal of social life, an ideal which is in tension with the individualism of liberal economics and political philosophy. In brief, the direction of the last twenty years of social teaching has been to encourage the building of socioeconomic structures which, in the words of Paul VI, "form anew fraternal relationships" through a more equitable sharing of material goods and social resources.⁵

This strongly egalitarian development of modern Catholic social teaching arises out of a reading of the signs of the times as calling for the reduction of inequality. There seems to be a practical judgment on the part of the magisterium that the acceptance of inequalities, even for good moral reasons, has resulted only in greater disparities between social groups and in the aggravation of fundamental injustices. To put it another way, the toleration of formerly justifiable inequalities, such as large landholdings, has led historically to a deterioration of whatever bonds of solidarity previously existed and has diminished the prospects for fuller human fellowship in the future. The documents of this period speak over and over again of a "crisis of solidarity" in our time. The conjunction of the theological affirmation of human solidarity with this judgment of the historical failure of nations to eliminate the worst forms of impoverish-

⁵ On distribution as a function of government with respect to the common good, see *Christianity and Social Progress* 73-81, esp. 74 and 79; *Peace on Earth* 53-59; *Pastoral Constitution* 69-70, notably 74; *Development of Peoples* 23, 133-34, 48-50; and esp. *Call to Action* 46. For qualification of the doctrine of private property, compare *Christianity and Social Progress* 104-21 with *Pastoral Constitution* 69-71 and *Development of Peoples* 22-28; on the communitarian vision, compare the focus on individual participation in the common good and individual human rights in *Christianity and Social Progress* and *Peace on Earth* with Part 1, chap. 2 of the *Pastoral Constitution* 23-32 and *Development of Peoples* 14-21, 43-55, 66-75, 79.

ment and injustice, therefore, seems to have resulted in a radicalization of Catholic social teaching.⁶

This radicalization represents not just a shift in emphasis but rather a change in the Church's social strategy. In the teaching of the past two decades, the correction of inequality is not just another theme added to a long list of concerns, so that a shift in the direction of social doctrine emerges slowly over time through subtlety and nuance. Rather, correction of inequality becomes the key to the social strategy of the Church, realigning other principles of justice and conceptions of right in its wake. Egalitarian redistribution becomes the means of redressing many injustices. Injunctions are laid for the redress of inequality in the expectation that egalitarian policies will lead to surer measures for the elimination of poverty and other elementary injustices than the complicated system of social principles which had been utilized even as late as John XXIII's *Mater et magistra*. The prolonged failure of pluralistic conceptions of justice to bring about policies and practices which made inroads against the worst forms of deprivation appears to be the primary occasion for this redirection in Church teaching. In sum, historical experience theologically understood and a shift in ethical methodology, rather than theological revision alone, brought about this turn in Catholic social ethics.⁷ It is a radical turn, because equality is proposed as the way to rectify multiple injustices.

In the pages that follow, Part 1 explores the theological sources of official Catholic egalitarianism. First, it reviews the magisterial reading of the signs of the times and its conclusion that the growth of inequality is the basic social problem of our day. Secondly, it examines the impact of the theological concept of human solidarity on the Church's economic ethic. Part 2 aims at clarification of the economic doctrine of the conciliar and immediate postconciliar period. I further specify my use of the terms "solidaristic equality" and "relative equality" in interpreting the social

⁶ I shall argue in Part 2 that "fraternal relationships" form the deep theory in modern Catholic social teaching. That is, the controlling insight of the social doctrine is that socioeconomic developments ought to bring about community between social groups. Alternately, they ought not to increase the differences between them. I take the phrase "deep theory" from Ronald Dworkin's treatment of Rawls. The deep theory represents a level of unreflected belief about what counts as fairness or justice between persons. See Dworkin's *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1977) 177-83.

⁷ The supposed failure of pluralistic theories to bring about continuous remedies for elementary injustices is a matter I hope to pursue at greater length in later studies. The specific problem is whether they can keep from relapsing into desert-based theories.—The radicalization of Catholic social teaching continued with John Paul II's *Laborem exercens* (1981). But since its methodology differs from that of the postconciliar period I have presented here, I have chosen not to include it. Of particular note is John Paul's return to the language of human dignity as a central ethical warrant in place of human solidarity.

doctrine of this period; I contrast the universalistic and egalitarian perspectives of the recent magisterial teaching with other twentieth-century Catholic uses; and I defend the magisterial position against objections from Christian Realists that the Church's social vision is insufficiently realistic about human depravity and economic motivation.

I

Reading the Signs of the Times: The Advance of Inequality

The method of discerning the signs of the times was developed in a series of church documents beginning with *Pacem in terris* and concluding with Paul VI's apostolic letter *Octogesima adveniens*. Paul spoke of this discernment as a "theological interpretation of contemporary history." He added that it consists in an attentive effort "to discover, in time, signs . . . indications of a relationship with the kingdom of God. . . ." Maurice Cardinal Roy, commenting on this method, put it this way: "(The method of discernment) consists in asking whether the unfolding of this history is really in conformity with . . . biblical and messianic history, which, according to the New Testament, continues from the Resurrection of Christ until his second coming, the Parousia." The key to this interpretation of history is to ascertain whether or not "events, accomplishments and currents of opinion . . . represent or not an enrichment of human nature (historically understood)." Accordingly, reading the signs of the times is something Christians can do in dialogue with people of good will; and that is what John XXIII did in *Pacem in terris* and Vatican II did in the Pastoral Constitution. "It is the right and duty of every man and of all men," wrote Roy, "to carry out this discernment between events and the moral good they know through their consciences."⁸ Thus the discrepancy between developments in the world and the conscientious judgments of men and women about the emergent good of humanity seen by the light of the gospel serves as the matrix for discerning the signs of the times.

The Aggravation of Inequality

In setting forth the agenda for his *A Call to Action (Octogesima adveniens)*, Paul VI made clear his reading of the contemporary social situation as a crisis of inequality. He wrote with urgency about the task of justice which lay before the Church and humankind. Surveying the globe, he saw everywhere unjust disparities in need of rectification. He wrote:

⁸ Roy, "Reflections" 562.

Flagrant inequalities exist in the economic, cultural, and political development of nations: while some regions are heavily industrialized, others are still at the agricultural stage; while some countries enjoy prosperity, others are struggling against starvation; while some peoples have a high standard of culture, others are still engaged in eliminating illiteracy. From all sides there rises a yearning for justice and a desire for a better guaranteed peace. . . .⁹

Later, commenting on the technological, economic, and military competition between nations, he noted the destabilizing effect of this rivalry on the quest for justice. The ambition of nations, he wrote, "stands in the way of setting up structures in which the rhythm of progress would be regulated with a view to greater justice, instead of accentuating inequalities and living in a climate of distrust, and struggles which would unceasingly compromise peace." Thus Paul took note of the process whereby the toleration of inequality for the sake of progress, private or national advantage, and national security only exacerbates fundamental injustices, drawing people farther and farther apart. Left to themselves, these principles of social organization and public policy only break down the bonds of solidarity which unite men and women to one another in one human family. In a word, justified inequality becomes the enemy of a fraternal social order.

A Call to Action came as the culmination of a long running critique by the magisterium of the imbalances in modern social and economic relations. While John XXIII's *Mater et magistra*, the most extended treatment of economic life by a modern pope, had already noted some of the inequities of modern economic life, particularly the discrepancy between expanding economic growth and a more limited social progress, its message lacked the critical tone of later social teaching. The turning point in the assessment of economic development came with *Gaudium et spes*. Its second chapter argued from the equality of persons in creation and redemption to the reduction of serious inequalities. "Excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups," it reasoned, "cause scandal, militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace" (29). This passage exhibits the logic which will be characteristic of the magisterial thinking during Paul's pontificate, namely, that inequality is inconsistent with a common humanity.

There are four steps to this criticism of inequality.¹⁰ First, the warrant

⁹ Henceforth quotations from the magisterial corpus in my text will be annotated parenthetically. Sometimes the enumeration refers to paragraphs, at other times to larger units, depending on the individual text.

¹⁰ The mode of analysis here follows Stephen Toulmin's informal argument in *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University, 1958).

for equality is established in the common origin and destiny of the human race. Secondly, this warrant is used to justify a general principle for the reduction of inequality: a "demand" for "a more humane and just condition of life." Thirdly, backing is given to the deductive argument by quasi-empirical claims about the consequences of inequality for the social order. Lastly, empirical claims are made, again by way of backing, about the consequences of inequality for social and international peace. Later, in other documents, this empirical backing will be expanded. It is important to note that the Council fathers are objecting to the divisiveness of inequality. They are critical of inequality because it is not consonant with human dignity and ultimate human solidarity, but they object to it as well because it destroys community. It is this latter argument, I shall contend later, which points to the "deep theory" of justice underlying the principle of relative equality.

The Council fathers made the reduction of inequality one of the major themes in their treatment of socioeconomic life. They objected to "economism"—the permeation of nearly all aspects of personal and social life with an "economic outlook" (63). The first number of the treatment of economic life sets the problem of inequality as focal issue for the whole of chapter 3 of the Pastoral Constitution. "We are at a moment in history," they observe, "when the development of economic life could diminish social inequalities. . . . Yet all too often it serves only to intensify (them) . . . (and) even results in a decline in the social status of the weak and in contempt for the poor." They go on to cite a panoply of problems: the contrast between bare subsistence living and economics of affluence, between lives confined to the struggle for existence and those capable of enjoying many individual preferences; disparities between agricultural workers and those in industry and the gap between rich and poor nations. Finally, they conclude this introduction with a reflection on the "sharper awareness" people share today of the injustice of inequality, and they themselves call for "numerous reforms . . . at the socioeconomic level, along with universal changes in ideas and attitudes" (63). In short, their reading of the signs of the times is a call for the elimination of inequalities.

Two passages of the third chapter are of special pertinence to our theme. Number 66 bears the title "Removing Huge Differences," and it requires "vigorous efforts . . . to remove the immense inequalities which now exist." The examples cited in this section show the range of applicability of conciliar egalitarianism; for the passage takes up the problems of farmers, of guest workers and migrants, and of those affected by automation of industry. No one is to be excluded from the banquet of life.

A primary theological warrant for the inclusion of marginal groups in the enjoyment of prosperity is found in the famous number 69 under the

title "The Common Purpose of Created Things." This may well be the most important single passage in the contemporary Church's social teaching, because it is cited as the backing for later developments in economic ethics, particularly in Paul VI's *Development of Peoples* 22-24. Summarizing patristic thought on material possessions, the passage proclaims: "God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people. Thus, as all men follow justice and unite in charity, created goods should abound for them on a reasonable basis." The Council went on to apply the doctrine particularly to the problem of world hunger and pleaded: "let all individuals and governments undertake a genuine sharing of their goods."

Paul VI's *Populorum progressio* carried on the assessment of inequality begun by the Council with an added note of urgency. "Left to itself," he wrote, modern economics "works rather to widen the differences in the world's level of life, not to diminish them: rich peoples enjoy rapid growth whereas the poor develop slowly. The imbalance is on the increase. . ." (8). And again: "We must make haste. Too many are suffering, and the distance is growing that separates the progress of some and the stagnation, not to say the regression, of others" (29). Thus the social analysis of *Development of Peoples*, like that of the Pastoral Constitution, stressed the persistence and spread of inequality as the primary social question of our time. The problem areas covered by the encyclical are much the same as those treated elsewhere. What is different is a change of tone. Economics is no longer treated as a neutral topic in simple need of moral guidelines. It is now seen as a primary cause of inequality. This general line of criticism, furthermore, is specified still more by strong criticism of "liberal" economic policies, of materialism, consumerism, and the mystique of growth.¹¹ To this is added a holy impatience that the alleviation of inequality be got underway.¹²

Paul's *Octogesima adveniens*, a commemoration of the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, like the other documents cited here, sees the social question in terms of inequality. The introduction to the letter, as we have seen, points to inequality as the rubric for interpreting an array of social problems.¹³ Paul, moreover, linked his own deepened insight into contemporary conditions of injustice to his journeys to Third World countries. Accordingly, once again he called for "greater justice in the sharing of goods, both within national communities and on the international level." In addition, he condemned international rivalries over technological, economic, and military superiority as an aggravating

¹¹ *Development of Peoples* 18-19, 26, 41, 55, 58.

¹² *Ibid.* 1, 29, 80.

¹³ See earlier in this section on "The Aggravation of Inequality."

source of basic injustice. "This ambition," he wrote, "stands in the way of setting up structures in which the rhythm of progress would be regulated with a view to greater justice, instead of accentuating inequalities and living in a climate of distrust and struggle. . ." (2).

Finally, in this fragmentary review of the magisterial analysis of inequality as the basic social problem of our day, we must cite *Justice in the World*, the document of the second Synod of Bishops (1971). The Synod begins its treatment with an exposition of the crisis of solidarity, the paradox of the unprecedented potential for the unity of humankind made possible by technological progress and the reality of growing antagonisms at most levels of society. "In the last twenty-five years a hope has spread through the human race that economic growth would bring about such a quantity of goods that it would be possible to feed the hungry at least with the crumbs falling from the table, but this has proved a vain hope. . ." "Stifling oppressions," it continues, "constantly give rise to great numbers of marginal persons, ill-fed, inhumanly housed, illiterate, and deprived of political power as well as of the suitable means of acquiring responsibility and moral dignity." It concludes: justice demands "that the general condition of being marginal in society be overcome, so that an end will be put to the systematic barriers and vicious circles which oppose the collective advance towards enjoyment of adequate remuneration of the factors of production. . ." ¹⁴

To summarize: in the period following *Pacem in terris*, the method of reading the signs of the times first employed by John XXIII in that letter led the magisterium to identify inequality as the central social problem of our times. This reading brought together a social analysis of inequality at many levels in society and in many spheres of modern life with an acceptance of widespread desires for equality and the Church's tradition of social teaching. It condemned economism, the ideology of economic growth, and the rivalries of nation states; and it appealed for a wider and generous sharing of goods. *Gaudium et spes* summed up the teaching of this period when it said: "Excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, militate against social justice, equity, and the dignity of the human person, as well as social justice and international peace."

Theological Foundations: Human Solidarity and Universal Charity

The methodological shift to signs of the times led to the identification of inequality as the major social problem of our time and to recognition

¹⁴ From *Justice in the World*, in *Renewing the Earth* 392, 393-94. Numbered paragraphs are not available for this text.

of the need to control the dynamisms—economic development, technological progress, nation-state rivalries—which led to accelerating inequality. But more was needed to shift the direction of natural-law teaching in an egalitarian direction. The factor which made the difference here was the rerooting of the Church's social teaching in theological sources. The theological turn in magisterial natural-law thinking drew on patristic teaching on justice in such a way that equality emerged both as a central theological affirmation and as a primary normative principle.

No single theological proposition lay behind the egalitarian turn in Catholic social teaching. Human dignity and the image of God in the human person, for example, continued to be fundamental themes in this period as they had before, and in the social ethics of John Paul II they have gained new prominence. But the distinctiveness of conciliar and postconciliar social doctrine is to be found in the idea of human solidarity and the cluster of religious symbols associated with it. The historical origin of this concept is the teaching on material goods by the Fathers of the Church. Appealing to our common humanity, they taught the obligation of relief of the poor even out of the substance of one's wealth, not just from superfluous goods.¹⁵

Pope Paul, in *Development of Peoples*, quoted St. Ambrose on this principle and made Ambrose's thinking central to his own economic ethics. Writing to the rich, Ambrose wrote: "You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich" (23). The patristic conception of human solidarity, therefore, rests on the biblical concepts of the unity of the human race and the gift of the earth for the welfare of the entire human family.

In this same spirit, as we have seen, the Council fathers in *Gaudium et spes* proclaimed: "God intended the earth and all that is in it for the use of every human being and people. Thus, as all men follow justice and unite in charity, created goods should abound for all on a reasonable basis" (69). On this basis the Council taught the social nature of property. "In using (created goods)," they reasoned, "a man should regard his lawful possessions not merely as his own but also as common property in the sense that they should accrue to the benefit not only of himself but of others" (69). On the same basis, of course, everyone is entitled to "a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family" (69). Thus, in the teaching of the Council, human solidarity is the basis of a doctrine of private property that guarantees entitlements for the sake of

¹⁵ For further elucidation of patristic economic ethics, see Charles Avila, *Ownership: Early Christian Teaching* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983).

human welfare at the same time that it limits private accumulation to the same end.

The patristic conception of the unity of the human family with its implications for distributive justice is only one aspect of a rich theology of human solidarity in the Pastoral Constitution. The second chapter of *Gaudium et spes* presents a grand vision of humanity's communitarian vocation (23–29). It takes the human likeness to God, participation in the redemption, the common human calling, and our shared destiny as the foundations of human equality (29). On these grounds, moreover, it establishes the claim that “the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition” (29). In particular, the Council fathers asserted, equality requires the elimination of “excessive economic and social differences between members of the one human family” (29). The need to eradicate such differences is made all the more urgent, they reasoned, by virtue of the increasing interdependence of peoples. “In our times, a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of absolutely every person. . .” (27).

The use of the term “solidarity” at one time to point to the grounds of equality, at another to refer to new obligations, and at still others to speak parenetically of a spirit of solidarity may seem confused to ethicists.¹⁶ The same polyvalent usage will be found in the writing of Paul VI, for whom it is a favorite theme.¹⁷ To some extent this conflation of concepts may be attributed to the high rhetorical style of the magisterial documents. The mixing of foundations and obligations is also, of course, a familiar move in the naturalistic style of ethical thinking long associated with Catholic natural-law ideas.¹⁸ Theological warrants aside, the same kind of naturalistic thinking on these issues is to be found in appeals to solidarity based on growing global interdependence made both in and outside the churches during the last two decades.¹⁹

More problematic from an ethical point of view is the conflation of duties, virtues, and ideals. Such a confusing mixture of categories under a single term can make the setting of priority rules among competing

¹⁶ The universalistic use of “solidarity” by the Council and Paul VI must be distinguished from the solidarism of Heinrich Pesch, the socialization of John XXIII, and solidarity with the poor in liberation theology; see Part 2 below.

¹⁷ For an example of the multiple uses of solidarity in papal discourse, see Pope Paul VI's “Address to the World Food Conference,” in Joseph Gremillion, ed., *Gospel of Peace and Justice* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976) 599–606.

¹⁸ For an illustration of this naturalism in Thomistic political and social theory, see Thomas Gilby, *Between Community and Society* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955).

¹⁹ For examples of appeals to solidarity on the basis of interdependence, see the popular *Limits to Growth* (New York: NAL, 1972) and the far more sophisticated argument of Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1979).

principles an intractably difficult task. But, as recent developments in philosophical ethics have suggested, it may be equally impossible to sustain any ethics of obligation apart from an ethos in which ideals and virtues also play a central role.²⁰ Thus, while the conflation of categories may be a deficiency from the point of view of the prioritizing tasks of analytical ethics, seen from the point of view of its social role the magisterial doctrine performs far better because it provides a social vision as well as moral action guides.

From the point of view of normative ethics, the most important step in the use of the language of solidarity was Paul VI's specification of "duties of solidarity" in *Populorum progressio* (43–55). In the name of solidarity, he identified the duty of the rich to sacrifice and indeed to labor to bring about a more equitable world (47). Similarly, he taught that rich nations had a duty to devote part of their production to provide "a truly human standard of living" both for their own people and for citizens of the underdeveloped world. "The superfluous wealth of rich countries," Paul wrote, "should be placed at the service of poor nations" (49/n53). Applications of this duty of solidarity included a "transfer" program which would take funds from armament budgets and give them to the work of development, multilateral aid, and a world development fund. These duties of solidarity were distinguished from related duties of social justice having to do with international economic relations, particularly trade policies, and the Third World's quest for a new international economic order. Duties of solidarity, by contrast, had to do with the responsibilities of "the haves" to close the gap(s) which divides them from "the have-nots." Paul wrote (47):

It is not just a matter of eliminating hunger, nor even of reducing poverty. It is a question rather of building a world where everyone . . . can live a fully human life . . . freed from the servitude imposed on him by others or by natural forces over which he has not sufficient control; a world where freedom is not an empty word and where the poor man and Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man.

In a word, duties of solidarity enjoin those who have the power to do so to close ranks with those from whom their privilege separates them. They are requirements that the privileged use their resources to build up a community of life with the unfortunate and oppressed.²¹

²⁰ On the necessary interplay of principles, ideals, and virtues in an effective moral system, see Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1981), and Basil Mitchell, *Morality: Religious and Secular* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980).

²¹ To see the distinctiveness of the solidaristic base for correction of poverty, compare the magisterial materials with Henry Shue, *Basic Rights* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1980) 35–64, 111–30.

The continuity of solidaristic duties with the requirements of charity can now be readily seen. The third component of the duty of rich nations to poor ones, after duties of solidarity and duties of social justice, according to Paul, are obligations of universal charity.²² These he defines as “the effort to bring about a world that is more human towards all men, where all will be able to give and receive, without one group making progress at the expense of the other” (44). Just as duties of solidarity enjoin ending the dynamisms that drive the poor farther and farther away from the rich, so the duties of universal charity require the development of fraternal social relations between peoples and nations so that social ties restrain progress that would be made at the expense of any group. Paul VI applies the term “duty of charity” to such activities as the treatment of immigrants and guest workers, the conduct of multinational business and international development programs, and to cross-cultural dialogue. In all cases the emphasis is on building an inclusive world community with a common quality of life.²³

The distinctive contribution of charity to Paul’s social vision may be seen in his treatment of urban problems and of migrant workers in *A Call to Action*. His proposal with respect to urban life is to promote a spirit of community, of brother/sisterhood, which overcomes the pressures for isolation, exploitation, and indifference found in the modern city. To combat the anonymity and anomie of city life, for example, he urges the building of centers and gathering of people so that “the individual can escape from isolation and form anew fraternal relationships” (11). He appeals again to neighborliness and brotherhood (10). He concludes his discussion of the needs of emigrants with a similar appeal, quoting Vatican II (*Nostra aetate, Declaration on the Relationship of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* 5) (17):

We cannot in truthfulness call upon God who is the Father of all if we refuse to act in a brotherly way toward certain men, created in God’s image. A man’s relationship with God the Father and his relationship with his brother men are so linked together that Scripture says: “He who does not love does not know God” (1 Jn 4:8).

²² Pope Paul’s contrast of duties of solidarity and duties of charity differs, it seems, from traditional renderings of duties of justice and of charity. The distinction is not about two sets of acts, but rather about acts and the dispositions which give rise to those acts. Duties of charity, whether for individuals or nations, refer to matters of agency, i.e., attitudes of inclusiveness and mutuality. I am grateful to Prof. Karen Labacqz, Pacific School of Religion, for drawing this development to my attention.

²³ The key texts supporting the demand for a common (inclusive) quality of life are the description of the common good in *Mater et magistra* 79 and Paul VI’s theory of integral development, *Development of Peoples* 14–21, esp. 21, together with the doctrine of the “universal purpose of created things” (22–24).

Thus the duties of universal charity require that men and women reach beyond national boundaries, ethnic and cultural divisions, or whatever differences divide them, to develop the kinds of patterns of respect, support, and concern that usually characterize families and small communities rather than larger social groupings. It is a reappropriation of the biblical image of nations East and West sharing as one family at the one table of the Lord in the kingdom of God.

What duties of universal charity add, then, to duties of solidarity and social justice is an active commitment to the building of community, even on transnational lines. From the point of view of moral agents, whether individuals or groups, they entail a commitment to overcoming exclusions and divisions and to fostering solidaristic bonds, and they encourage a cluster of attitudes which would contribute to the building up of community, virtues like forgiveness, helpfulness, generosity, and hospitality. Overall, the impact of charity in Paul's moral theological system is to contribute positive energies to the building up of a fraternal/sororal world.²⁴ In sum, while solidarity aims at bringing about material conditions for an equal share in a fully human life, charity aims at bringing about the spiritual and personal attitudes which contribute to human fellowship and at making those attitudes effective across groups and cultures.

To conclude this section, the transformation of the magisterial teaching on social justice, though it had already been altered by John XXIII, was significantly advanced in the postconciliar period by the adoption of the reading of signs of the times as a method of theological moral analysis and by the theological rooting of social doctrine in the affirmation of human solidarity. Even the grounding of justice claims in human dignity was reconceived by the Council so that equal dignity of each person emerged out of the solidarity of the human family in God's grace.²⁵

The method of reading the signs of the times led to the judgment that inequality is the major social problem of our day, a problem brought about and aggravated both by economic and technological growth and by politico-military rivalries. From the theological idea of solidarity were drawn the warrants for an equitable social order and for demands of redistribution towards a common quality of life for all, both within nations and among them. To this end, claims of right to private property were seriously attenuated, affluent nations or populations were enjoined to close the gaps that divide them from the poor, and a rich vision of the

²⁴ See Gibson Winter, *Elements for a Social Ethic* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 228-35, for a communitarian theory of justice in which social tendencies and religious symbols jointly define the norms, and so provide a method and normative scheme parallel to that of the recent magisterium.

²⁵ *Church in the Modern World* 29.

common life of all peoples was held up as the goal of economic productivity and growth. This "end-state" condition to be brought about by continual redistribution sets the contemporary Catholic vision at odds with the libertarian visions of economic life defended by philosophers like Robert Nozick and economists like Milton Friedman; it is far even from the liberal vision of John Rawls.²⁶ The goal is that we all be able to sit down at table together in celebration of a full human life. What makes that possible is the regulation of our institutions by what I have called the norm of relative equality.

II

In this second part I would like to do three things. First, I will try to give some greater clarity to the norm of relative equality. Secondly, I will explain the relationship between the "deep theory" of solidaristic equality and the normative principle of relative equality. In this context I will also try to distinguish the use of solidarity in the contemporary social teaching from other Catholic usages in the present and recent past. Finally, I will try to answer the Realist objection that "human solidarity" is a utopian ideal.

Relative Equality: The Norm

Relative equality is a normative formulation of solidaristic equality. It is the moral instrument of a theological vision of human life. It is an attempt to create a regulative principle which can enhance the conditions of human solidarity. As I indicated earlier, the basic thrust of the norm is that the distance between any set of groups ought to be curbed so that their ability to act in a fraternal/sororal way toward one another is not subverted. It tries to effect this eradication of differences by enjoining repeated distribution of wealth, income, and resources to make a full human life available to all. This description entails three functions: (1) the (re)distribution of resources on egalitarian lines, (2) for the realization of full human life by all, (3) in a spirit which reduces differences and increases the life shared in common. William Ryan has caught the gist of the principle of relative equality in his argument for "Fair Shares." He writes: "The goal of those who advocate the Fair Shares system of equality is the continual expansion of (these) boundaries, so that more and more of life's essential resources and amenities are consciously shared within the sphere of public enterprise."²⁷

²⁶ For a critique of the Rawlsian position on grounds Catholic thought would appreciate, namely, a failure to present a full theory of the human good and a neglect of human community, see Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (New York: Cambridge University, 1982).

²⁷ William Ryan, *Equality* (New York: Pantheon, 1981) 189-90.

Given the Church's preferential option for the poor, it is clear that one form of relative equality included in the Catholic teaching is the maximim criterion: "any allocation that improves the position of the less advantaged is more equal."²⁸ Insofar as John XXIII's theory of justice looked to socioeconomic development to promote the welfare of everyone, the maximim criterion seems to have been operative in his thinking. With the failure of economic development to bring parallel social progress, it seems to me that given the magisterium's interest in reducing differences a "least difference" criterion is probably the closest formulation to what is intended. That is, "any allocation which decreases the absolute difference between the greater entitlement and the lesser is more equal."²⁹ Thus the emphasis of relative equality on continued redistribution to prevent the differences between groups from growing or forming permanent divisions between them.

There are two reasons for thinking the "least difference" principle is the way relative equality is to be understood in a Catholic context. The first is that the Catholic vision of humankind's communitarian vocation, as articulated in *Gaudium et spes* 23–32, understands human beings as created "for social unity." Accordingly, differences among gifts are primarily opportunities to serve the community. Should differences begin to divide community or reduce the opportunity for solidarity, they need to be held in check. The fundamental function of relative equality, therefore, is to channel and direct those social dynamics which tend to alienate people from one another. The second, related reason for choosing the "least difference" formula of relative equality is the historical assessment that tacit reliance on economic-growth models has led to increased poverty in the world, whether that increase is measured in relative or absolute terms.³⁰ The "least difference" formula commends itself out of the failure not just of economic theory, but also of pluralistic theories of justice, such as Catholicism held at mid-century, to bring about significant improvements in world poverty. Multiple principles of justice supported by appeals to conscience have simply proved ineffective as a way of correcting social imbalances. Multiple principles can be organized into many different patterns to too many self-interested purposes. Relative equality, conceived as "least difference," makes clear that inequality is the problem and community the goal.

²⁸ See Rae et al., *Equalities* 110.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 112.

³⁰ For a review of the growth of global inequality prior to 1980, see my "Basic Needs: Criterion for the Legitimacy of Development," in John Langan, S.J., and Alfred Hennelly, S.J., eds., *Human Rights in the Americas: The Struggle for Consensus* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 1982) 245–88, esp. 246–50.

Solidarity: The Deep Theory

Solidaristic equality is the foundational conception underlying relative equality. It is the deep theory beneath the practical principle. The expression "deep theory" refers to the tacit intuition or vision that undergirds a conception of justice. Secular moral and political philosophies, shy about making statements of ultimate belief, either remain silent about deep theory or barely hint at it, so that others must draw out those beliefs, as Ronald Dworkin, for example, has explicated the deep theory of John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* as "an equal right to concern and respect."³¹ In the case of the magisterial teaching, we have no such hesitancy on ultimate belief. In the theology of the Vatican Council and Paul VI, as I explained in Part 1, equality is grounded in solidarity in the great mysteries of faith: creation, redemption, and eschatological hope.

There are two functions to solidaristic equality which are not covered by relative equality alone. First, social justice, as a normative program for society's institutions, orients those institutions to inclusiveness. It scrutinizes all policies for the effects of exclusion. The second function is to stimulate the willingness of all parties to sacrifice for the sake of others' inclusion in the common life.

In the first place, there is a persistent concern that no group be excluded from a fully human life and that whatever the natural cultural or functional differences between them, members of every group share in relatively the same quality of life. This is clearest in Paul VI's notion of development, which moves progressively from the eradication of absolute poverty to include those "more human conditions" characterized by "faith in God" and "unity in the charity of Christ."³² In the Lucan image shared by the Council and Paul VI, solidaristic equality proposes a world where "the poor man Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man."³³ Quality of life is to be shared.

The conception of a shared quality of life finds its paradigmatic expression in the reiteration of the patristic doctrine of the common purpose of created things; for the fundamental point in that teaching is not so much the eradication of misery among the poor, but more the orientation of material goods to the service of the common life.³⁴ On the practical side, the clearest sense of the import of this doctrine may be

³¹ See n. 6 above.

³² See *Pastoral Constitution* 29, 66, 69, etc., and *Christianity and Social Progress* and *Peace on Earth* on responsibility to the common good.

³³ *Development of Peoples* 14–21, esp. 20–21; 39–42.

³⁴ *Development of Peoples* 47; *Pastoral Constitution* 27.

found in the earlier teaching of John XXIII.³⁵ John insisted on the balancing of economic growth and social development. National wealth, he taught, is to be judged by its contribution to a general enjoyment of "a full and perfect life."³⁶ John wrote: "the economic prosperity of people is to be assessed from . . . the distribution of goods according to norms of justice so that everyone in the community can develop and perfect himself."³⁷ On this ground he argued that "vigilance should be exercised and effective steps taken that class differences arising from disparity of wealth not be increased, but lessened so far as possible."³⁸ Moreover, the government as agent of the common good is responsible for correcting disparities and inequalities that arise as a result of economic activity and for distributing increased output through public services "to ensure the advantages of a more humane way of life to all."³⁹ There is a clear line of development from John XXIII's teaching on the common good to the postconciliar emphasis on equality. Nevertheless, it is the postconciliar emphasis on the common purpose of creation that sets John's egalitarian interests free of the constraints of a pluralistic conception of justice to be the organizing features of the magisterial theory of justice. The effect of this theological renovation of the Catholic principles of justice is found most clearly in Paul VI's idea of integral development. "In order to be authentic," Paul wrote in *Development of Peoples*, development "must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person." "Human fulfillment, understood as the fulfillment of the 'whole of humankind,' constitutes, as it were, a summary of our duties" (14, 16).

If solidaristic equality is marked in the first place by a shared quality of life, the second distinguishing characteristic is the willingness of all parties to sacrifice for the sake of others' inclusion in the common life. This is a theme amply demonstrated in John XXIII's two social encyclicals, where various groups are asked to adjust to the needs of those who have been left behind by social developments.⁴⁰ But it is clearest in the demands made in the postconciliar literature upon wealthy individuals and nations to sacrifice for the sake of the needy.⁴¹ In *A Call to Action* Paul VI reminds his readers that the aspiration for equality cannot be attained through legislation alone, but requires a preferential respect for the poor. "The more fortunate," he writes, "should renounce some of

³⁵ *Pastoral Constitution* 69; *Development of Peoples* 22.

³⁶ *Christianity and Social Progress* 74, 79; *Peace on Earth* 64.

³⁷ *Christianity and Social Progress* 73-74.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 74.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 73.

⁴⁰ See especially *Development of Peoples* 47-49.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 23-24, 47-48.

their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others" (23). Equality, he contends, cannot be established by legislation alone. Before legislation can be effective, it must be rooted in a "deeper feeling of respect for and service to others." Thus the attainment of a common quality of life depends on and involves a mutuality of concern on the part of the whole society. There is a perception that equality is rooted in solidarity and apart from solidarity will become empty, even counterproductive (as in the case of the liberal theory of individual rights).⁴²

Once again we must acknowledge the communitarian character of this theory of egalitarian justice. The "deep theory" is that the goal of societal relations is a community in which men and women treat one another like brothers and sisters.⁴³ The deep meaning of solidarity is to be found in charity. In such a social vision the distances that divide people from one another in society are overcome. Mutual concern, mutual respect, mutual service draw people together. Relative equality is the appropriate normative principle in this context both because it affirms the common humanity of all and, more importantly, because it constrains differences to prevent distinctions from creating barriers between members of the one human family.

There are three uses of solidarity in modern Catholic thought from which the universalistic solidarity of recent magisterial thinking needs to be distinguished. In the first place, this solidarity should not be confused with the solidarism of Heinrich Pesch. Solidarism, while it emphasized the common good, nonetheless came down firmly on the side of social differentiation on corporatist lines. By comparison, the later teaching, including some strands of John XXIII's teaching, particularly his conception of the common good, while recognizing differentiation as a material and social reality, aims specifically at reducing differences between groups, sectors, and classes. In addition, the recent teaching promotes the equal sharing of all in a full human life, an egalitarian aim foreign to solidarism.

The second mid-century use of solidarity from which solidaristic equality needs to be distinguished is a sociological usage. Sometimes, with echoes of Durkheim, the writings of John XXIII and Paul VI refer to the increasing interdependence of modern social and economic life as solidarity.⁴⁴ The more usual terms for this phenomenon are "socialization" and "interdependence." By the *analogia fidei* these social developments

⁴² See *A Call to Action* 23.

⁴³ *Christianity and Social Progress* 79.

⁴⁴ See Emile Durkheim, *Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Macmillan/Free Press, 1964).

are seen to be in continuity with the communitarian direction of the human vocation.⁴⁵ In the case of solidaristic equality as it develops in Vatican II and after, however, the emphasis is less on the automatic process of social development, which certainly was part of the optimism of *Mater et magistra* and *Pacem in terris*, and more on the moral claims of solidarity founded on theological affirmations of common humanity. The diminished accent on the growth of social co-operation is no doubt the result of the heightened sense of inequality which came with the reading of the signs of the times. While solidarity as the complexification of social ties remains part of the holistic vision of society, from the Council onwards the appeal to solidarity depends less on actual social developments and more on a theological vision of human origins and destiny. Thus solidaristic equality, while it might have empirical correlates, as it does in John's encyclicals, depends finally on theological insights to validate its understanding of human sociality. This move is in keeping with the general movement of Catholic moral theology away from a strictly natural-law base towards broader theological foundations. But, as we have seen, the failures of history seem to have hastened this turn to theology. What we have, then, is a complex theory in which theology has a decisive role to play, not in independence of history but rather in conjunction with an assessment of the historical failures of economic development.

The third use of "solidarity" from which the conciliar and postconciliar usage of the magisterium needs to be distinguished is liberation theology's expression "solidarity with the poor." For liberation theology, solidarity is a partisan act. It means taking the side of the poor in their liberation from oppression. In this sense solidarity re-enforces the divisions of history. The justification for this, of course, is an eschatology of reversal. By divine favor the poor are on the right side; by eschatological justice "the lowly are exalted." Liberation solidarity differs from the solidarity of the postconciliar doctrine, therefore, in that it is exclusive. Solidarity does not mean coming together, but going over to the other side. Much can be said on behalf of the liberation position. Here I am concerned merely to contrast it with the inclusive, universalistic meaning employed in the magisterial teaching.

Two points can be made in defense of the inclusive conception of the magisterial position. First, liberation theology provides no universal standard of justice. Justice lies on the side of the poor, injustice with power and privilege. Accordingly, there is no standard by which to judge the conduct of the poor and their partisans. There is no norm to tell

⁴⁶ For a careful working out of the *analogia fidei* in the social and political philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, see Gilby, *Between Community and Society*.

when the party of the victim becomes the oppressor. By contrast, magisterial solidarity sets a common standard of justice. Its inclusiveness, moreover, shares in the New Testament priority of community. This is the second point, namely, that the religious morality of Christianity calls for an in-gathering love in the image of the universal, salvific love of God.⁴⁶ The practical political side of a doctrine of inclusive love is that it represents the insertion of grace-filled action into the divisiveness of the political world.

Egalitarian Justice and Political Realism

A challenge to the magisterial teaching from both the right and the left of the political/theological spectrum is the charge that the official social teaching is politically naive and utopian. Paul VI's sympathetic treatment of utopian thinking in *A Call to Action* (37) gives prima-facie plausibility to this accusation. The general reliance of the magisterial style of social ethics on right thinking as the route to social reform also lends support to the charge. But the chief criticism arises on theological grounds. The magisterial position is thought by Christian Realists to underestimate the effects of human sinfulness on political life and therefore to neglect the conflictual aspects of politics in its approach to social problems. From a Niebuhrian perspective, the magisterial eschatology is too optimistic, the magisterium's estimation of possibilities of human achievement is too positive, and its social strategy is too trusting in the good will of the rich and powerful to enter into communion with the poor and disenfranchised in the name of solidarity. In short, the charge is that official Catholic sociology is insufficiently realistic in its program of social change.

At the level of theological foundations, there is a further reason for granting some plausibility to the charge of naïvete. The Pastoral Constitution, and particularly its introductory theological vision (12-45), key texts in the development of social teaching, are marked by a progressivist eschatology which sees humanity as growing, if only fitfully, towards the fulness of Christ. In the developmental anthropology and Christology of this document, sin makes a necessary but inconsequential appearance (13). The clear emphasis is on the movement towards consummation in "Christ, the Alpha and Omega" (22, 32, 39, 45).

The magisterial theology is nonetheless highly defensible, especially from the point of view of theological methodology; for it takes its warrants from a far broader range of fundamental theological affirmations than the sin-dominated theories of Christian Realism. The doctrines of crea-

⁴⁶ On inclusive righteousness in NT moral teaching, see PHEME PERKINS, *Love Commands in the New Testament* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist, 1982).

tion, incarnation, redemption, sanctification, and eschatology all play a role in establishing the theological foundations of the renewed social theology of human solidarity and the ethics of egalitarian justice. Moreover, the analogy of faith brings about a consistency among these several doctrines which makes possible a strong affirmation of God's continued action in the world and the transformation of history by grace. From the point of view of theological ethics, the critique of the social teaching for political utopianism represents an instance of the classic debate between Catholicism and Protestantism over human depravity. Methodologically, it raises questions about whether a single theological doctrine ought to have decisive weight in determining an ethic or whether several doctrines need to be taken in concert to establish an adequate Christian ethic. The *analogia fidei*, furthermore, suggests a way in which the unity of doctrines can be utilized in the specification of a Christian ethic. Thus, seen from the point of view of fundamental moral theology, the magisterial social teaching can make a case that it is firmly rooted in Christian faith, taking a broad range of faith affirmation into account in grounding its theological ethic. Accordingly, realists would have to demonstrate that they have serious grounds for utilizing a narrower theological ethic.

The question of the place of sin in the social teaching still lingers. For a developed sense of historical sin in the recent social teaching, we must turn not to the theological affirmations but to the contemporary history. The sinfulness of human history emerges out of a review of the signs of the times. At the level of historical analysis, the magisterium can hardly be faulted for underestimating the effects of human selfishness. Its reading of the signs of the times shows the effects of social sin everywhere and spells out a systemic analysis of the causes of the degrading divisions brought about by technical and economic change, political domination, national rivalry, and ideology. This reading, moreover, has grown more sober with the times.

The Christian Realist, of course, may recognize this sobriety, yet not be satisfied, because the magisterium does not turn its recognition of the sinful facts into a theory of the role of egoism, self-interest, and conflict in social strategy. The point to be made in response to this charge is that in our own day the problem of social sin has been intensified by the rationalizations of the Christian Realism itself. That is, Christian Realism has failed to be an effective critic of liberal political economy, out of which many of today's social problems arise. In fact, it has become the source of ideological defenses of resurgent capitalism. Self-interest has become more and more a conscious ethical motive freed from the restraints of traditional morality. Secondly, the policy of balancing interests advocated by Christian Realism has been judged a failure from both right

and left as more and more groups have asserted their interests against others. These are historical ironies that Reinhold Niebuhr, with his acute sense of the unexpected contradictions of history, would surely have recognized. The strength of the contemporary Catholic view is that it offers both more apparent moral checks against an ideology of self-interested ambition and an avenue to an alternative policy to the failed strategy of countervailing groups.

Finally, the magisterial teaching may be defended on the grounds that it asserts the active presence of grace in history. By identifying those forces which are in keeping with the unfolding of "messianic history," by teaching that human nature is revealed in Christ and the history of humanity, by focusing the communitarian calling of the race, and by making explicit demands that material development be matched by social progress, the Church herself serves as an agent of conversion and sanctification for sinful humanity. She offers a way out of the impasse between dying ideologies.

In conclusion, the social teaching of the conciliar and postconciliar period, of John XXIII, Paul VI, and Vatican II, radically altered Catholic thinking on social ethics in an egalitarian direction. Catholic egalitarianism emerged out of two theological developments: the methodological shift to signs of the times and the retrieval of the patristic idea of human solidarity. In combination, the application of signs of the times to contemporary developments revealed inequality as the central social problem of the period, and the appeal to solidarity gave theological warrant to egalitarian social policies. The underlying theological reason for this egalitarianism, I have argued, is Catholicism's profound belief in the communitarian character of the human vocation. The magisterium has judged economic and social developments lacking insofar as they have led to divisions between groups. These divisions may exist as ideological oppositions and class differences, but they are described time and again simply as the enjoyment of a quality of life not shared by others. Thus solidaristic equality was defined as inclusive sharing in a common quality of life. To bring about such sharing, the magisterium has enjoined various kinds of obligations (e.g., duties of solidarity, of social justice, of charity) to bring about the necessary redistribution. Since the whole system of justice demands repeated redistribution to keep differences from growing, I have suggested that the term "relative equality" accurately expresses the normative control for which the magisterium is looking in social relations. Relative equality implies that there can be legitimate differences but that these must always be regulated to common sharing in a full human life.

The egalitarianism of recent Catholic social teaching points up the

importance of the shift to theological resources in moral theology. Both signs of the times and the concept of solidarity, of course, have connections to natural-law doctrine. According to Cardinal Roy, signs of the times is an updating and historicizing of natural-law thinking.⁴⁷ Human solidarity, though grounded on Christian beliefs, also was a tenet of the Stoics, from whom the Fathers drew natural-law thinking. But it is truly out of a return to theological sources that Catholic egalitarianism emerged. Theological focus provided the means of adjusting various competing injunctions, such as the right to private property and the role of government intervention; but it also clarified in a vivid way the central concern of Catholic social ethics, the common good. The common good, reconceived in theological terms, is no longer an abstract principle of adjustment for competing principles of justice; it is the image of familial sharing in the banquet of life: Lazarus and the rich man sitting down together at the Lord's table.

⁴⁷ Roy, "Letter," nos. 56, 129, 152, 158.



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