

Development of the Social Teaching of John Paul II

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While trying to put somehow in order my recollections of our common years as students, myself with the future John Paul II, in the Faculty of Theology in this same "Alma Mater", during the now remote period 1946-48, I am afraid I couldn't find any memory of the future Pope's concern with what we now call the social teaching of the Church. Such a subject, even under some other form of presentation, was not on the horizon of the Faculty of Theology in the Angelicum during those years after the Second World War. I do not remember that there was any reflection on the tragedy most of those present in the University had gone through: war and peace, just or unjust war, licit or illicit use of weapons and similar issues. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not that far back. And more than half of Europe had fallen under the Communist regime after having suffered under Nazism and Fascism just before. I do not remember there was any course or seminar on such very contemporary subjects about which both Pope Pius XI or Pius XII, the Pontiff at the time, had quite openly expressed their minds not that much before. Italy, where we were living, was at the same time in serious danger of becoming Communist herself. The decisive election of April 1948 took place precisely while we there studying. Our concerns, professors and students alike, were then very different. We had obviously more than one course on the First and Second parts of the Summa Theologica, Prima and Prima Secundae, with their very rich content on the foundations, philosophical and theological, of human behaviour, and each of us could, and perhaps did, arrive at his own conclusions regarding moral problems also in such fields, but as far I can remember, we were

never invited to do it. Our professors in those fields, Fr. Lumbreras (Spaniard, but he came from the Philippines) and Fr. Rohner kept rather carefully to the letter of the Summa, which had its advantages indeed but did not at least immediately open up other perspectives. However that may be, when many years after Pope John Paul II insisted in the drafting of "Sollicitudo rei socialis" that the social teaching be ordered under the theological category of moral theology (n. 46) he was perhaps referring back, knowingly or unknowingly, to those courses in the Angelicum many years before on the Prima Secundae of the Summa Theologica.

As far as I am able to recall, his fields of interest at that time seem to have been quite different. The theme of his dissertation is there to prove it: Saint John of the Cross and the "Cantico espiritual". But also, I am sure, he was already deeply interested in ethics. In fact, when he went back to Poland in 1948 he had already in his programme the further specific study of philosophical ethics: whether it was a suggestion of his Archbishop I cannot tell. I would not be surprised if it was; in Communist Poland the problem of ethics was acutely posed. He went for his further study to the University of Lublin. And then the young Wojtyła had already in his pocket, or got soon after, the assurance of a scholarship in Belgium in the Catholic University of Louvain (only one at the time) precisely for the study of Philosophy. His second academic degree, and the corresponding dissertation are, as we all know, upon Max Scheler's Phenomenological Ethics. He taught also Social Doctrine of the Church in his own archdiocese. I seem to remember the now Cardinal Dziwisz telling me once that he had heard professor Wojtyła lecturing on this subject in Krakow when we was a young priest.

Let me now turn to my own personal experience of the concern of Pope John Paul II with this same subject. I was called to the Roman Curia at the beginning of 1977 to become the secretary of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews; nothing to do, at least directly, with social teaching. But those were the years in Latin America of the strong debates on the Theology of Revolution, first, and thereafter, or rather simultaneously, on the Theology of Liberation. I was involved in all this. When I came to Rome in October 1977 the idea of a document on this particular form of theology was being discussed at the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, whose Prefect at this time was soon to be, as we all know, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. The proposal to have such a document prepared came from the Congregation but I wouldn't be surprised, because of what I learned later, if the first step in that direction did not come from the Pope himself. The Pope gave his specific approval to the document "Libertatis nuntius" and ordered it published, as everybody can read at the end of the document. That document is in itself an important text of social teaching, the principles of which are there expounded. So this would be the first formal document of Pope John Paul II on the subject and it has to be taken into account in any complete presentation on the Pope's thought on such a subject. For some reason, in August or September 1984 I was called from Bangalore in India, where I was involved in a meeting on the Bible, to present this document, with other specialists, to the media. The document was dated August 6th of that year. The theoretical side of Communism, namely Marxism, as well as its practical application are very much present in that document.

Then it was decided to draft another document on the same subject, from what one may call a positive point of view, if the first one could be taken to be rather negative. This decision gave us "Libertatis conscientia", published on 26th March 1986. I was invited to collaborate in the drafting of this second document of social teaching, and still have a vivid image of the more than one meeting those working on the document had with the Holy Father during lunch under the presidency of Cardinal Ratzinger. The Pope mostly heard the information about what we were doing but also expressed himself and offered some suggestions. The document therefore comes also from him, even if it bears the signature of the Cardinal Prefect of

the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. But exactly like the first one, it was specifically approved by the Pope and published because of his personal decision. The true conception of freedom and the consequences of such a conception for the life of the individual and for common life in society can be found in it. We may see here again another important contribution to the social teaching whose deep roots may perhaps be found in the courses on the *Prima Secundae* we followed together, myself and the young Wojtyła, in this same "Alma Mater" in 1946-48.

In the meantime "Laborem exercens" had been published" (14 September 1981), the publication delayed by the attack on the person of the Holy Father on May 13 of that year. Work and workers had always been a main concern of the Pope. And this, I believe, was for two reasons. Firstly, he once was a salaried worker himself, an experience no Pope has had until the present day. And then, secondly, Communism is mainly about work and workers and the Pope had been a worker under a Communist regime. He could speak on the subject not from what he had heard or read, but from what he had personally gone through. And this again is unique.

Perhaps even his concern for liberation comes from the same source, in part at least. That this was one of his permanent concerns, in the general context of the social teaching of the Church, can be illustrated also by a small story of which I was part. I had just been appointed Vice President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, whose main task since its creation by Pope Paul VI is precisely the study, elaboration and diffusion inside and outside the Church of the social teaching. I took the place of Bishop, later Archbishop and Cardinal, Jan Schotte, who was involved in the drafting of "Laborem exercens" under Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, then President of the Dicastery, as he had been before in the drafting of "Octogesima adveniens" with Paul VI (1971). When I asked the Pope why he would have transferred me from the Commission of Religious Relations with the Jews to Justice and Peace, such a different task, he simply answered, "because you are knowledgeable in social teaching". Why he would say this is still not very clear to me. However, the day after my Episcopal Ordination, in the Audience he admitted me to alone, before he

received my family and friends, he went a bit further and said: "I hope you will try and elaborate a kind of Theology of Liberation faithful to our true tradition". At the same time he had sent a letter to the Brazilian Episcopate on the occasion of their "ad limina" visit that year where he opens his mind on the same subject of liberation (8 April 1986), a document which should not be forgotten. This happened in March and April 1986.

After that, Pope John Paul II told us, Cardinal Etchegaray and myself, that he intended to commemorate solemnly the 25th anniversary of "Populorum progressio", Pope Paul's great Encyclical on the true sense of development, with another Encyclical, which then became "Sollicitudo rei socialis". The Pope had two very special points in mind for this Encyclical: one, he wished to clarify what we would call the epistemological position of the social teaching, not just a series of more or less useful recommendations on how to behave personally or communally, much less another ideology in the social field, but a branch of Catholic Theology and indeed of Moral Theology: as the present n. 41 of this document expressly teaches. This was again part of the effort to reap the best from Liberation Theology. And two: he wished to propose solidarity not just as a kind of pious engagement on behalf of our neighbours but as a Christian virtue in its own right, indeed as a part of the main virtue of charity: thus teaches the present nn. 40 and following in the encyclical. He was well aware that the term, and the notion, did not come from any Christian source but even in this case, it could, and should, become Christian. I recall there was afterwards some discussion and even polemics because the Latin text of "Sollicitudo" never used "solidaritas" but one or other circumlocution and so the French Bishops were accused of having introduced the term in their French translation because of their so called "socialistic" sympathies. The term was there since the beginning of the drafting. And the translation into the French language was prepared by the Secretariat of State, which normally is in charge of translations. "Sollicitudo" was made public the 30th December 1987. In the background of "Sollicitudo" lurks the fateful division of the world into two blocs, and this is reflected in the text as also a kind of diagnosis of the influence of sin in human relations, personal and otherwise, despite the fact that the reference to "structures of sin" is not accepted by everybody.

Then came the centenary of Leo XIII's "Rerum novarum" (1st May 1891), an encyclical the Pope appreciated greatly. He expressed the wish to have an encyclical prepared and published for the anniversary. He knew well that "Rerum novarum" had marked its time and opened a completely new epoch in the Church's social teaching. Thus it had been commemorated by the succeeding Popes, with the sole exception of Pope Pius X, anniversary after anniversary, since Pius XI with "Quadragesimo anno" (1931). Pius XII, in the midst of the Second World War, did not want to miss the fiftieth one and managed to have a meeting of workers in St. Peter Square with a remarkable allocution of his own for St. Joseph's feast day in 1941. John XXIII had "Mater et Magistra" published in 1961 and Pope Paul "Octogesima adveniens", mentioned above, for the eightieth anniversary, although for some reason this time we did not have an encyclical but an apostolic letter, perhaps a lesser kind of a pontifical document but always, of course, official magisterial teaching. This kind of chronological succession along the years is not certainly mere commemoration. The point is continuity and deepening, with the further elaboration of the "Social Teaching". This is why the very first paragraph of "Sollicitudo" mentions a "corpus", an organic body of the selfsame teaching. Pope Benedict XVI has followed the same tradition in "Caritas in veritate", made public for the 40th anniversary of "Populorum progressio" (29th June 2009).

For the preparation of what then became "Centesimus annus" Pope John Paul asked Cardinal Etchegaray and myself to gather a group of the main economists, social and political, and of the different tendencies that we could get hold of, and hear them about the present challenges posed to the economic sciences and how to respond to them from their own points of view. With the help of our lay scholars in Justice and Peace we gathered almost twenty of them, a real "who's who" of the economic sciences in the eighties and nineties of the last century. We had a full day seminar with them, Then the Pope invited all of them for lunch and spoke with and to them. Part of the proceedings were then published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in a remarkable volume which is still there to be read, particularly in these times of severe world economic and social crisis. I keep carefully engraved in my memory what the Pope

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said to them at the beginning of our lunch, in English; "not many economists come to this table; many Bishops do, and they mostly complain about economists". If there was any ice to be broken, it melted down in no time. I add that this was not the only meeting we had with this category of people not very often seen in the august Vatican halls. On the request of some of them we had another seminar after the publication of "Centesimus annus" (1st May 1991).

"Centesimus annus" was intended as a kind of written proof of the prophetic vision of Pope Leo XIII and his collaborators for "Rerum novarum", Cardinals Zigliara and Mazzella with Fr. Liberatore SJ. What has come after in the social teaching of the Popes could not do without it, and is in a true way explained by it. The main themes

developed in the following documents find there their roots, and are nourished by the rich sap of its intuitions.

Pope John Paul's last social Encyclical works somehow as a kind of synthesis of his entire social thought. Now it is for his successors to follow along the same track, building on his foundations and on those of his predecessors. The work will be never finished because history goes on until the Lord comes again. But the work on social teaching, while always starting anew, cannot be understood, nor indeed usefully thought through, if it is not built on what each Pope for his own time deemed necessary to say. And in this succession, or, more properly said, in this tradition, Pope John Paul II has had, and for ever will have, a unique place.