

COMMENTS ON THE PAPER OF PROF. RUSSELL HITTINGER

DIARMUID MARTIN

In my comments on the paper of Prof. Hittinger I wish to address especially the relationship between the principle of Subsidiarity and Pope John Paul II's use of the term 'subjectivity of society'. Prof. Hittinger refers to this question on page 88 of the paper.

Pope John Paul's major philosophical writing was dedicated to human person as an 'acting person'. His philosophical insights and his experience of totalitarian regimes contributed to his understanding that subjectivity is a basic element in the nature of the human person. The concept of the subjectivity of society is something demanded therefore by the essential subjectivity of the human person. What is the relationship between the concept of the subjectivity of society and that of the principle of Subsidiarity?

The idea of the subjectivity of society is taken up by Pope John Paul in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (#15) in the specific context of his reflection on the right to economic activity. Pope John Paul notes that the affirmation of this right is 'important not only for the individual but also for the common good'. The suppression of this right to economic activity diminishes or destroys the spirit of initiative 'that is to say the creative subjectivity of the citizen'. Where creative initiative is suppressed, the human person is damaged; it produces passivity, dependence and submission to bureaucracy. The Pope's thought, and that elaborated by Prof. Hittinger, make it clear that where the subjectivity of the person and the subjectivity of society are not respected and fostered, the State or the 'bureaucratic apparatus' becomes totalitarian, that is it sets itself up as 'the only ordering and decision-making body – if not also the owner – of the entire totality of the goods of production' and puts everyone in a position of almost absolute dependence and passivity.

Pope John Paul applies this principle to the totalitarianism of the political parties of the one party States of the communist model of the times

which he well knew, which damaged the true subjectivity of society to such a degree that people were unconsciously reduced to the role of objects. The long term effects were indeed to render the lack of true subjectivity within the totalitarian regime a contributing factor to the revival of a civil and economic free system in the years after the fall of communism.

Pope John Paul makes the concept of the 'subjectivity of society' into one of the underlying principles of his concept of development. The denial or the limitation of the right to take initiative in economic matters impoverishes the person as much as the deprivation of material goods. To overcome the deficit that had emerged requires a response which activates a culture of creative activity and subjectivity with the whole of society.

The subjectivity of society and the right to participation are based then on an essential dimension of the human person: subjectivity. Human persons 'enjoy their own spheres of autonomy and sovereignty', according to *Centesimus Annus*. In *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul states that authentic democracy:

requires that the necessary conditions be present for the advancement both of the individual through education and formation in true ideals, and of the 'subjectivity' of society through the creation of structures of participation and shared responsibility.

He thus stresses the principle of Subsidiarity, while primarily an organizational principle regarding society, is not a simple pragmatic principle but one with clear anthropological roots.

It is in interrelationships on many levels that a person lives, and that society becomes more 'personalized'. Inter-subjectivity enables persons to form a society and thus to act in solidarity, but individuality is not subordinated totally to the common good and respect for individual subjectivity requires a principle of Subsidiarity which allows such subjectivity to be respected and to flourish:

The social nature of man...is realized in various intermediary groups, beginning with the family and including economic, social, political, and cultural groups which stem from human nature itself and have their own autonomy, always with a view to the common good.

In the free society, the state is one institution, one player, among others. It is an indispensable player in its service to all the other players, but it is subject to the subjectivity of society, and the subjectivity of society consists in free persons and in free persons in community living in obedience to God and solidarity with one another.

The individual today often feels trapped between the traditional poles two poles of the State and the marketplace. This sense of entrapment and

disorientation is accentuated by the fact of a globalization in which the market exists without boundaries and the international community exists still only in an embryonic framework and is thus inadequate to provide for the effective governance of global economic goods and global security. The challenge today is then to establish new forms of networks of intermediate communities which give life to specific networks of solidarity on a global level.

Where do such forms exist? There is already in embryonic form the emergence of a global public opinion. This can be seen in the achievements in the area of public opinion in movements such as the Jubilee campaign for the fight against the external debt of poor countries, the campaign against landmines, or the international campaign against the death penalty.

Pope John Paul II especially in his Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* addressed a wide range of areas in the context of international economics. The Encyclical is much more, however, than an encyclical on economics; it is about the free society, including economic freedom. It stresses that economic activity is indeed but one sector in a great variety of human activities, and like every other sector, it includes the right to freedom, as well as the duty of making responsible use of freedom:

The economy in fact is only one aspect and one dimension of the whole of human activity. If economic life is absolutized, if the production and consumption of goods become the centre of social life and society's only value, not subject to any other value, the reason is to be found not so much in the economic system itself as in the fact that the entire socio-cultural system, by ignoring the ethical and religious dimension, has been weakened, and ends by limiting itself to the production of goods and services alone. All of this can be summed up by repeating once more that economic freedom is only one element of human freedom. When it becomes autonomous, when man is seen more as a producer or consumer of goods than as a subject who produces and consumes in order to live, then economic freedom loses its necessary relationship to the human person and ends up by alienating and oppressing him.

This has consequences the regarding the relationship between the market and the other forces in society. The market cannot respond to all needs:

It would appear that, on the level of individual nations and of international relations, the *free market* is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs. But this is true only for those needs which are 'solvent', insofar as they are endowed with purchasing power, and for those resources which are

'marketable', insofar as they are capable of obtaining a satisfactory price. But there are many human needs which find no place on the market. It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied and not to allow those burdened by such needs to perish.

For Subsidiarity to flourish within a market economy, it is important to invest in the enhancement of human capacity, so that people can flourish in their subjectivity and creative capacity within the economy and society in a manner worthy of their dignity:

It is also necessary to help these needy people to acquire expertise, to enter the circle of exchange, and to develop their skills in order to make the best use of their capacities and resources. Even prior to the logic of a fair exchange of goods and the forms of justice appropriate to it, there exists *something which is due to man because he is man*, by reason of his lofty dignity. Inseparable from that required 'something' is the possibility to survive and, at the same time, to make an active contribution to the common good of humanity.

The principle of Subsidiarity limits the legitimacy of State intervention in the economic field. *Centesimus Annus* (#49) indicates, as one example, intervention to regulate monopolies. Unfair monopolies are obstacles to Subsidiarity, hindering the ability of smaller enterprises to enter the market. At times, large international business enterprises can use their political power to establish quasi-monopolies in developing countries, by negotiating guarantees against risk which place them in an advantageous position over and above local businesses. Where development aid is tied to the use of services from the lending nation, this can simply be a means of privileged entry into the markets of developing countries, once again to the detriment of local enterprise and indeed to a true sense of development.

Centesimus Annus (#49) while criticising the abuse of influence by monopolies, is also highly critical of social assistance models which creates a dependency on the part of its recipients:

By intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility, the Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending.

Here again the principle of *subsidiarity* must be respected: a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but

rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.

The response to need in society will be more effective then when it is inspired within the framework of the subjectivity of society.

In fact, it would appear that needs are best understood and satisfied by people who are closest to them and who act as neighbours to those in need.

This kind of response which springs from the local community will be qualitatively superior:

It should be added that certain kinds of demands often call for a response which is not simply material but which is capable of perceiving the deeper human need. One thinks of the condition of refugees, immigrants, the elderly, the sick, and all those in circumstances which call for assistance, such as drug abusers: all these people can be helped effectively only by those who offer them genuine fraternal support, in addition to the necessary care.

The concept is almost identical with a similar reflection of Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est*:

Love – *caritas* – will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable. The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person – every person – needs: namely, loving personal concern.

We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. The Church is one of those living forces: she is alive with the love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ. This love does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, something which often is even more necessary than material support. In the end, the claim that just social structures would make works of

charity superfluous masks a materialist conception of man: the mistaken notion that man can live 'by bread alone' (*Mt* 4:4; cf. *Dt* 8:3) – a conviction that demeans man and ultimately disregards all that is specifically human.

The principle of Subsidiarity must also be linked with the principle of responsibility. There has been a move away from a stress on the role of the State to one in which the positive aspects of the market and of human economic initiative are stressed, albeit with due reservations regarding the limits of the market. In a knowledge-based society the human person, human initiative and human creativity are the driving force of economic development. Such a vision of economic development requires a new understanding of investing in human capacity and the subjectivity of society.

Poverty is the inability to realise God-given potential. Fighting poverty is above all about investing in people. It is about finding the ways – financial and technical – to ensure that people can realise their talents and improve their capacity. Perhaps the Church had not got it so wrong in the past when so much of its development work was in the field of education.

Today Subsidiarity has to be envisaged within the context of a globalised economy, of global goods and of a global common good. While this is the case, it is also true that still States make up the backbone of international relations. International Organizations are made up of Member States who act often primarily on the basis of the primacy of national interest. Even within the most evolved form of international cooperation ever known, namely the European Union, national interest can still be a major driving force for its members. International Conventions are ratified by States. They relinquish voluntarily their own sovereignty – but in most cases not definitively and more and more often States are prepared to ignore obligations assumed or defy internationally recognised norms.

Global realities and interests exist today more than ever. But we do not have adequate governance structures, to cope with the political and economic interests involved. International norms, like any other system of norms and laws, are needed to protect the weak, to curb the arrogance of the powerful and, in a spirit of Subsidiarity, to foster the participation of all.

The universal destination of created goods applies in its own way to equitable access to be active participants in the mechanisms of the international structures which govern and regulate global realities. There has been progress towards the elaboration of certain norms which constitute international law, but there are few sanctions available to apply to those who do not respect that law, especially if the non-respect is by a powerful nations.

In this context, the World Trade Organization – despite all its imperfections – is perhaps one of the most advanced Organizations in this area in that it has shown that it can tackle large as well as small offenders.

A system based on Subsidiarity will require not just rules but a framework of values and ethical norms based on the truth about the human person. A democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism.

Democracy cannot be limited to a series of rules concerning human interaction; it must be founded on the basis of a correct conception of the human person and of his or her right to participation. The subjectivity of society requires Subsidiarity that is a framework of bodies which contribute to the fostering of the truth and of honesty in public life. Once again in *Centesimus Annus*:

It must be observed in this regard that if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism.

The State or the party which claims to be able to lead history towards perfect goodness, and which sets itself above all values, cannot tolerate the affirmation of an *objective criterion of good and evil* beyond the will of those in power, since such a criterion, in given circumstances, could be used to judge their actions. This explains why totalitarianism attempts to destroy the Church, or at least to reduce her to submission, making her an instrument of its own ideological apparatus.

Pope Benedict in his Encyclical *Spe Salvi* (#22) stresses even more clearly the consequences of a political framework which moves forward without values:

The ambiguity of progress becomes evident. Without doubt, [progress] offers new possibilities for good, but it also opens up appalling possibilities for evil – possibilities that formerly did not exist. We have all witnessed the way in which progress, in the wrong hands, can become and has indeed become a terrifying progress in evil. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner growth (cf. *Eph* 3:16; *2 Cor* 4:16), then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world. There is no doubt, therefore, that a 'Kingdom of God' accomplished without God – a kingdom therefore of man alone – inevitably ends up as the 'perverse end' of all things as described by Kant: we have seen it, and we see it over and over again.

'A kingdom of accomplished without God!' The challenge to this Academy is to foster a new form of dialogue between the social sciences and all those concerned with development and human advancement to focus on how the fact of openness to the transcendent can foster new forms of solidarity and Subsidiarity truly at the service of a participatory vision of community and participation.

Such an openness will only succeed in the context of a society which truly respects its own subjectivity and thus the principle of active Subsidiarity.