

THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE TASK OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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The Development of the Catholic Social Doctrine

The development of Catholic social doctrine does not just start with Leo XIII. Even earlier the Church expressed her opinion about social matters, but not in such systematic treatises as has been the case since Leo XIII. The Church had always defended social justice. Every human being's right for existence, food, work and integration into society has constantly been her preoccupation.¹ However, she did not directly mention general economic organization, but rather followed the trends in economic development attentively. Structural questions interested her as far as moral and social justice were implicated. She rejected for instance the communist system, not because of its economic inefficiency, but because of its materialistic philosophy. When criticizing the market economy, this was due to its social effects and in particular the unjust distribution of advantage and the exploitation of the poor.

The first comprehensive recommendations for an economic system took place in *Centesimus annus*. Pius XI had previously singled out a special part of the economic order, recommending the so called corporative order, which he interpreted as pure social organization free from any political interference. However he merely proposed bringing the different

¹ See: A.F. UTZ - B.V. GALEN, *Die katholische Sozialdoktrin in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Scientia Humana Institut, Bonn 1976, 4 Bde. French edition: *La doctrine sociale de l'Église à travers les siècles*, Documents pontificaux du XVème au XXème siècle. Editions Valores, Fribourg/Suisse - Editions Beauchesne, Paris, 4 vols. 1973.

professional groups into dialogue in order to realize the common good. These reflexions were not taken further by subsequent Pontiffs. Nevertheless they are by no means out of date. They have to be reconsidered in a new manner in connection with the question how to control the competitive economy. For the first time John-Paul II recommended in his Encyclical *Centesimus annus* an economic system which corresponds to the Catholic social doctrine: market economy. But at the same time he underlined some important caveats. Likewise the Church turned towards endorsing a renewed political order. She recommends today — after a reasonable and legitimate hesitation — the democratic order. By this change she did not abandon her uninterrupted teaching that all social activities have to converge towards the common good. Here she preserved the strand of Thomistic social philosophy which continues to appeal to natural law in the sense in which this was used by S. Thomas Aquinas himself.

Since the liberalism of the 19th century introduced an individualistic notion of property into the theory of economics, this individualistic view dominated economic theory and began to be influential in social theory with the result that the pluralistic conception of values superseded the ancient doctrine of common good which embraced economy, society and politics. From this time onward social problems could be treated only on the basis of the division in the three parts, though according to the social doctrine of the Church this division can only be understood as a conceptual and formal segmentation. In reality economy, society and politics form a unique entity defined by the common good. Economic rationality does not only concern material efficiency, it has also to consider culture and morality. Without culture and social morality the social costs will increase, placing more and more of a charge on the economy. The same is the case for pluralism of values in politics. An efficient pluralism does not exist without a basic consensus. A State in which the pluralism of values is not established on a basic consensus is not viable for long.

Discussing Catholic social doctrine with the social sciences now takes place with formal reference to the theory of market economy. That is the advantage for the development of Catholic doctrine because the Church can now express her opinion more distinctively and precisely. For instance when considering massive unemployment she will no longer only discuss the human right to labour but will critically analyse the thinking of economists in order to show where this thinking seems to be contradictory. Thus it is contradictory to talk about increasing the social product, whilst unemployment is growing. The division of social sciences did sharpen our outlook in some ways but also served to conceal any view of synthesis, inhibiting any overall conceptualization of the common good.

The Dialogue of the Church with the Economists

Debating with the economists, the Church questions whether the market economy is able to avoid an unemployment as massive as now exists. There must be a contradiction anywhere in which investments are increased in order to increase the social product, yet where the fact of unemployment is completely ignored. Catholic social doctrine requires from economic science a complete definition of the term of economic increase which includes all its social consequences. In such a way it will become manifest that the economist judges economic increase according to material progress alone, without evaluating its social and cultural components and above all disregarding the consequences for developing countries. Each manager knows that his enterprise has no long term prospects within an unbalanced national economy. The same is the case about national economies in relation to the world economy.

In like manner other examples could be enumerated for debate between the social doctrine of the Church and economic science. For instance: the social premises necessary to the market economy in order to ensure its proper social organization — the influence of open market policy on social and cultural stability of different countries — the wider diffusion of productive property in order to keep down the massive concentration of capital with its accompanying political power and to protect the economy against crises — the problem of monetary instability paralysing the savings and encouraging rampant consumption — the augmentation of credit combined with multifarious debts, producing an insolvent State which provokes disequilibrium in the balance of payments and generally in the world economy. The list could be continued infinitely.

Debates about economic problems should be led by experts in social doctrine of the Church who also have competence in economic science. Only in this manner will it be possible to widen the narrow framework in which the pure theory of economics operates.

The Dialogue with the Sociologists

According to Catholic social doctrine a basic moral consensus is the absolute condition for the stability of society. The doctrine of consensus is based on an epistemology which recognizes objective truth. However, much modern sociology tries to argue otherwise. It wants to stabilize the society by truth-neutral rules of mutual behaviour. The dialogue has to be intensified around this issue because these rules lack any stability. Yet social

instability increases economic costs and is a menace to political order. Not only are the fundamental institutions based on natural law, like marriage and family endangered, but also indigenous structures which developed historically. The fundamental question of how to assure the realization of common moral norms in a pluralistic society should induce the Catholic sociologists to think about how to organize the schools and the educational system in order to give the Catholic Church the possibility to teach freely her proper doctrine concern.

The Dialogue with the Political Sciences

In 19th century the Church resolutely rejected the democratization, not without reason because the idea of democracy denied any objective moral norms. Now she affirms democracy, because the civic authorities no longer recognize the moral authority of the Pope and therefore the moral influence of the Church now has to exert its effort through the actions of the faithful which cannot be realized without democracy. The following problems are of especial concern to the dialogue between Catholic social doctrine and politics: the economic, social and cultural conditions of democratization — the limits of a multiparty democracy — the stabilization of democracy by corresponding constitution — the norms of political instruction in schools — the protection of minorities — federal organization in worldwide politics — the relation between Church and State in pluralistic society, etc.

Conclusion

In the Encyclical *Centesimus annus* the Church expressed for the first time her opinion about the economic system using the typical point of view of modern economists. Now the Church is able to speak the same scientific language as the economists. The same relation between the Church's doctrine and the other social sciences can now be realized. The Church can now express her opinion in such a manner that she will be more easily understood by a sociologist or a specialist in politics.