

INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

Essay¹

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1. *Introduction*

How does the Social Doctrine of the Church apply to relations between generations? This is a timely question because, at the same time as globalization is transforming the geographical domain of the application of solidarity, the acceleration of the impact of human activity on the future of the earth and our societies, as well as scientific and technical progress in the control of long-run phenomena, are also transforming the inter-temporal domain of the application of solidarity.

From the early days of the Bible, revelation was understood as a message of hope that testified to God's benevolence towards man, and this message was renewed by the presence of Jesus Christ on earth and his resurrection. But the expression and understanding of this message need to be developed if we want to adapt that message to the contemporary age. This was something that *Gaudium et spes* announced: "Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spread-

¹This text is meant to serve as a background document for the investigation that the Academy wants to devote to the problems now posed by intergenerational solidarity in various parts of the world. A first version was discussed at the 2002 roundtable, in particular by Monsignors Crepaldi, Minnerath and Schooyans. Comments were also made by Academicians Betancur, Dasgupta, Glendon, McNally, Raga, Ramirez, Sabourin, Zacher and Zubrzycki. The author is, however, solely responsible for errors and imperfections. For exact quotations from the Magisterium texts in English he was assisted by Alessandra Petrillo.

ing by degrees around the whole world. ... Triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man, these changes recoil upon him, upon his decisions and desires, both individual and collective... As happens in any crisis of growth, this transformation has brought serious difficulties in its wake. Hence we can already speak of a true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well" (4). ... "To a certain extent, the human intellect is also broadening its dominion over time: over the past by means of historical knowledge; over the future, by the art of projecting and by planning. ... Thus, the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. In consequence there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as numerous as can be, calling for efforts of analysis and synthesis" (5).

When celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of *Gaudium et spes*, John Paul II did not just show that its *announcement of life and hope* remained perfectly timely notwithstanding the changes that occurred in the world since then. He also wanted to plead for the upholding of the spirit that had inspired its drafting, namely the "realism of hope".² We must keep this approach in mind in this review of the doctrinal writings.

Although the human community was always concerned about its future, it was ignorant of a number of elements that we now partly understand. Certainly, this does not remove the need for hope. But the enlargement of the field of our knowledge also means an enlargement of the field of our responsibilities. Each generation has more and more manifest and extended duties towards the next generations. Such is the context within which we must first recall what the Christian notion of solidarity is and then apply it to relations between generations.

2. *The principle of solidarity*

"In His preaching [Jesus Christ] clearly taught the sons of God to treat one another as brothers. In His prayers He pleaded that all His disciples might be one" (GS. 32).

"It is already possible to point to the *positive and moral value* of the growing awareness of interdependence among individuals. ... It is above all a question of interdependence, sensed as a *system* determining relationships in the contemporary world. ... When interdependence becomes rec-

²See *Gaudium et spes – Bilan de trente années*, No 39 in the journal *Laïcs Aujourd'hui*, Vatican City, 1996.

ognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a “virtue,” is *solidarity*.³

The synopsis of social doctrine that the Magisterium will soon publish stresses the increasing importance of the principle of solidarity. It argues in particular that the present social context prompts us to deepen solidarity. Living persons are more and more debtors for all they have received (conditions which make possible and appreciable the quality of life, an indivisible and essential heritage of culture, scientific and technical knowledge, tangible and intangible welfare ...). This debt, which is invaluable and indivisible, does not require what would be an impossible restitution but rather recognition in the form of sustained social actions thanks to which humanity will progress. Nothing should be allowed to hinder us in our attempts, motivated by solidarity, to provide present and future generations with their due.

3. *The family as the main provider of intergenerational solidarity*

In all human societies, families practice intergenerational solidarity. Indeed, this practice is highly praised in the social teaching of the Church. According to *Gaudium et spes*, “The family, in which the various generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life, is the foundation of society” (52). The route by which to enter the key and substantial parts of our subject is thus clear and precise. We cannot seek here to survey the whole of the Social Doctrine as it applies to the family – that would go beyond the confines of this essay. It would be possible in particular to show how social sciences contribute to supporting the vision of the Magisterium about the shadows that afflict the family in the present world and about the resulting evils. Instead we must focus on our specific subject and examine how the Doctrine is led to deal with intergenerational solidarity.

Let us refer to the Apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio* of John Paul II (November 1981). We see that our subject is examined in the third part, “The role of the Christian family”, after “Bright spots and shadows for the family today” and “The Plan of God for marriage and the family”, and before the last part “Pastoral care of the family: stages, structures, agents and situations”. In this third part let us first consider the sub-part “III.

³*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 38. These sentences were written for the context of solidarity between more or less developed nations. But they perfectly apply to that of solidarity between generations.

Participating in the development of society”, setting aside for our two following sections sub-part “II. Serving life”.

The family, states the apostolic text, is “the first and vital cell of society” (42). Let us note from the outset that this quotation explicitly refers to the family as a “conjugal community”. Many other passages speak of the father, the mother and the children. Thus reference is mostly made to the “family nucleus”. Of course the exhortation also recognizes the value of the concept of the extended family. It writes: “conjugal communion constitutes the foundation on which is built the broader communion of the family, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters with each other, of relatives and other members of the household” (21).

Does the apostolic text deliberately avoid mentioning the solidarity between remote generations of the same family lineage, bound by norms internal to the lineage, by the genetic heritage, by wealth and by behavioural traditions (according to which concerns for outsiders are more or less valued)? Should not this dimension be examined in a part entitled “The role of the Christian family”? What could the Academy propose on this point?

The nature of solidarity within the family is spelled out concisely but with perfect clarity: “The relationships between the members of the family community are inspired and guided by the law of ‘free giving’. By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this free giving takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service and deep solidarity. Thus the fostering of authentic and mature communion between persons within the family is the first and irreplaceable school of social life. ... In this manner ... the family forms the most efficient cradle of humanization and personalization of society” (43).

Lastly, the family must be open to social solidarity: “Families therefore, either singly or in association, can and should devote themselves to manifold social service activities, especially in favor of the poor, or at any rate for the benefit of all people and situations that cannot be reached by the public authorities’ welfare organization. In a special way the Christian family is called to listen to the Apostle’s recommendation: ‘Practice hospitality’ (*Rm 12, 13*)” (44).

4. *Procreation*

The demography of future generations will matter for them. This, of course, depends on the birthrate of present generations. How do the latter

interpret their solidarity duty in this respect? At least since the writings of Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) and with particularly acute force during the second half of the XXth century, this question often opposed the teaching of the Catholic Church to intellectual trends which were less confident about divine solicitude for mankind and more worried about demographic perspectives. This note is meant to present the Social Doctrine of the Church. However, it will not totally ignore the changing diagnoses drawn in the past from demographic projections. It will recall the choice of the Church for life, before turning attention, first, to the duties of the husband and wife, prior to those of public authorities.

“The Church firmly believes that human life, even if weak and suffering, is always a splendid gift of God’s goodness. Against the pessimism and selfishness which cast a shadow over the world, the Church stands for life: in each human life she sees the splendor of that “Yes”, that “Amen”, who is Christ Himself. To the “No” which assails and afflicts the world, she replies with this living “Yes”, thus defending the human person and the world from all who plot against and harm life” (Apostolical exhortation of John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 30).

On these grounds our colleague, Michel Schooyans, established a disturbing diagnosis of the present situation. I am quoting him, translating from the French: “Why do women have fewer children? Why is the population growth rate decreasing? Why is the population aging? These phenomena are observed practically everywhere in the world. In some places, such as Europe, they have the features of a *crash*. ... Applied to population, the word *crash* calls to mind the *rapid fall* in fertility and natality. The very clear decline of these indicators is a fairly new phenomenon. It is explained mostly by increasingly numerous interventions designed to control the transmission of life. The demographic decline assumes the form of a downfall, of a wreck: if man tends to disappear, what is the future for the world? Why this decline? Why this collapse? What consequences will follow?” (*Le crash démographique. De la fatalité à l’espérance*, Paris, Fayard, 1999, pp. 7-8). Although beyond the subject of this note and at times disputed, this diagnosis should not be neglected.

In 1965 *Gaudium et spes* stressed the duties of husbands and wives in the following words: “Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. They should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love. Thus they will fulfil their task with human and Christian responsibility,

and, with docile reverence toward God, will make decisions by common counsel and effort. Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church herself. The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God” (50).

This formulation was confirmed in 1980 by *Familiaris consortio*, which, quoting the Synod of Bishops held shortly before its publication, states: “This Sacred Synod, gathered together with the Successor of Peter in the unity of faith, firmly holds what has been set forth in the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 50) and afterwards in the encyclical *Humanae vitae*, particularly that love between husband and wife must be fully human, exclusive and open to new life (*Humanae vitae*, 11; cf. 9, 12)” (29).

The fact that a husband and wife are fully and exclusively responsible for giving life is stressed as follows in the same exhortation: “Thus the Church condemns as a grave offense against human dignity and justice all those activities of governments or other public authorities which attempt to limit in any way the freedom of couples in deciding about children. Consequently, any violence applied by such authorities in favor of contraception or, still worse, of sterilization and procured abortion, must be altogether condemned and forcefully rejected. Likewise to be denounced as gravely unjust are cases where, in international relations, economic help given for the advancement of peoples is made conditional on programs of contraception, sterilization and procured abortion” (30).

5. Education

The Social Doctrine seems to be quite complete about education in the family but almost silent about other institutions, which are in charge of teaching or contribute (positively or negatively) to education. However, future generations will benefit or suffer from what they will have received or not from these other institutions, which are playing an increasing role. As regards family education, here are the main points of the Doctrine, taken from the encyclical *Familiaris consortio*.

Parents bring their sons and daughters into life. “Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their fail-

ure in it. For it devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs" (36).

"Even amid the difficulties of the work of education, difficulties which are often greater today, parents must trustingly and courageously train their children in the essential values of human life. Children must grow up with a correct attitude of freedom with regard to material goods, by adopting a simple and austere life style and being fully convinced that "man is more precious for what he is than for what he has" (37).

"Children must be enriched not only with a sense of true justice, which alone leads to respect for the personal dignity of each individual, but also and more powerfully by a sense of true love, understood as sincere solicitude and disinterested service with regard to others, especially the poorest and those in most need" (37).

"Education in love as self-giving is also the indispensable premise for parents called to give their children a clear and delicate sex education. ... Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them" (37).

"The mission to educate demands that Christian parents should present to their children all the topics that are necessary for the gradual maturing of their personality from a Christian and ecclesial point of view" (39).

"The family is the primary but not the only and exclusive educating community. Man's community aspect itself – both civil and ecclesial – demands and leads to a broader and more articulated activity resulting from well-ordered collaboration between the various agents of education. All these agents are necessary, even though each can and should play its part in accordance with the special competence and contribution proper to itself. ... But corresponding to their right, parents have a serious duty to commit themselves totally to a cordial and active relationship with the teachers and the school authorities" (40).

6. *Teenagers and young adults*

They still have much to receive from the older generations. Depending on what they receive, they will be more or less able to pass on what is valuable to younger generations. Moreover, many of these teenagers and young people are suffering from the disorders of our modern societies. In addition

to parents, society itself has duties to them. I am therefore surprised to see that their case is so little mentioned in the texts of the Magisterium.

On two occasions the Holy Father has referred to the problem in his messages for the World Youth Days. In November 1991, announcing the theme of the VIIth Day (*Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel*), the Pope wrote: "Everyone knows the problems which plague the environment in which young people live: the collapse of values, doubt, consumerism, drugs, crime, eroticism, etc. But at the same time every young person has a great thirst for God, even if at times this thirst is hidden behind an attitude of indifference or even hostility". In August 1992, announcing the theme of the VIIIth Day (*I came that they might have life, and have it to the full*), he wrote: "Human existence has its moments of crisis and weariness, despondency and gloom. Such a sense of dissatisfaction is clearly reflected in much of today's literature and films. In the light of this distress, it is easier to understand the particular difficulties of adolescents and young people stepping out with uncertainty to encounter all the fascinating promises and dark uncertainties which are part of life. ... There are false prophets and false teachers of how to live. First of all there are all those who teach people to leave the body, time and space in order to be able to enter into what they call 'true life'. ... Seemingly at the other extreme, there are the teachers of the 'fleeting moment', who invite people to give free rein to every instinctive urge or longing, with the result that individuals fall prey to a sense of anguish and anxiety leading them to seek refuge in false, artificial paradises, such as that of drugs. There are also those who teach that the meaning of life lies solely in the quest for success, the accumulation of wealth, the development of personal abilities, without regard for the needs of others or respect for values, at times not even for the fundamental value of life itself".

The substance of these extracts does not seem to have been further elaborated. Indeed, young people themselves have hardly any responsibility in the bad features of the human environment in which they grow up. The papal messages in question aim rather to strengthen youngsters in their faith. A link, of course, exists between these extracts and the subject of section 9 below. But should not the Magisterium stigmatize more fully the neglect of important duties of which many parents, educators, teachers, writers, or people working for the press or the world of entertainment are guilty? For want of being able to do better, I shall just suggest that the issue should be seriously studied by the Academy.

A substantial literature certainly exists in the social sciences on the problems experienced by teenagers and young adults. A part of this literature is certainly relevant for our subject. I happen to know that Professor Eugenia Scabini, who teaches social psychology at the Catholic University of Milan, has devoted a large part of her research during the last decade to the set of topics that I just discussed. She could probably advise us.

7. *Care of the elderly*

The teaching of the Church speaks of the elderly in their relations with their families but hardly at all of income redistribution in their favour. Speaking below of the human environment we shall see that the welfare state was referred to in *Centesimus annus* only in Chapter V, where it is recognized as having “responded better to many needs and demands”, but where “excesses and abuses” are also mentioned. *Laborem exercens* seems to contain just one sentence in this respect, at the end of section 19, when a list of the social benefits to which workers are entitled is given: “the right to a pension and to insurance for old age and in case of accidents of work”. Should not the Church be explicit about the duties of the “indirect employer” in countries where social transfers are still scanty? Should she not be prepared to take a stand on the choices that will have to be made in Europe about the respective welfare of adults and of old people, when accelerated ageing of the population will impose some sacrifice on one or the other?

Section 27 of *Familiaris consortio* addresses the problem of the elderly in their families. First, one should observe that: “There are cultures which manifest a unique veneration and great love for the elderly ... They continue to be present and to take an active and responsible part in family life ... They carry out the important mission of being a witness to the past and a source of wisdom for the young and for the future. Other cultures, however, especially in the wake of disordered industrial and urban development, have both in the past and in the present set the elderly aside in unacceptable ways”.

The encyclical then declares that “the pastoral activity of the Church must help everyone to discover and to make good use of the role of the elderly within the civil and ecclesial community, in particular within the family”. It further quotes a speech by the Holy Father to the participants at the “International Forum of Active Aging” (5 September 1980, n. 5): “The life of the elderly ... is a marvellous proof of the interdependence of the people of God. Old persons often possess the charisma to fill in the

generation gaps before they are created. ... How many among them have eagerly endorsed these divine words: "The crown of grand-parents is their grand-children" (*Pr* 17, 6)!".

8. *Solidarity towards future generations – the physical environment*

Centesimus annus (37) wanted to express the concern that the Church shares these days with many of our contemporaries about ecological questions. In order to address them the Church locates her diagnosis in her teaching on creation. "Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. In this regard, humanity today must be conscious of its duties and obligations towards future generations". Let us look more precisely at these teachings.

Genesis announces not only that nature was the result of divine action but also that man is the preferred agent of God for carrying forward creation (*Gn* 1, 26-31). It would be out of place to trace here the long history of human action in the transformation of nature. We shall rather acknowledge that acceleration in scientific and technical progress in modern times has made us overly confident about our capabilities and overly greedy, up to the point of making us seriously shortsighted.

"Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him" (*CA* 37).

This aberration appears in particular when we consider changes in consumption habits, in relation to which the teaching of the Church has other reasons to be concerned: "A direct appeal is made to [man's] instincts – while ignoring in various ways the reality of the person as intelligent and free – then *consumer attitudes* and *life-styles* can be created which are objectively improper and often damaging to his physical and spiritual health" (36). And, as regards our present subject: "In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way" (37). Indeed, it is more and more clear that "natural resources are limited; some are not, as it is said, renewable. Using them as if they were inexhaustible, with absolute domin-

ion, seriously endangers their availability not only for the present generation but above all for generations to come" (SRS 34).

In addressing the ecological question, which duties should Christians feel bound to embrace? First, everybody should question their own behaviour and adopt a correct attitude: "that disinterested, unselfish and aesthetic attitude that is born of wonder in the presence of being and of the beauty which enables one to see in visible things the message of the invisible God who created them" (37).

The Church, moreover, asserts the principles which should underlie the pursuit of the *common good*. She has done this mostly when dealing with international questions – interdependence between nations appearing more and more in the most significant problems involved. She did this particularly in the encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, where environmental questions appear as subsidiaries to those involving development. Section 35 states: "when the scientific and technical resources are available which, with the necessary concrete political decisions, ought to help lead peoples to true development, the main obstacles to development will be overcome only by means of essentially moral decisions". Section 38 adds: "On the path toward the desired conversion, toward the overcoming of the moral obstacles to development, it is already possible to point to the positive and moral value of the growing awareness of interdependence among individuals and nations. ... It is above all a question of interdependence, sensed as a system determining relationships in the contemporary world ... accepted as a moral category. When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a "virtue", is solidarity. ... It is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all".

Our Academy might, I believe, consider whether it might not introduce elements which could make the teaching of the Church more precise in relation to the choice of environmental policies, whether local, national or international. I mean those policies which, by their positive intervention or their neglect, will most affect the fate of future generations. Which "scientific and technical resources are available which ... ought to help lead people to" live in a satisfactory environment? And thanks to which "necessary concrete political decisions"?

Signs suggest that the Church would see no difficulty in explicitly placing this search in the continuation of some principles which are fair-

ly generally accepted today. Thus Father René Coste⁴ brings out eight principles which, according to him, should serve as “landmarks for an ethics of ecology (within the framework of the ethics of creation)” (pages 506 to 511). I quote in particular *ethics of the future* formulated as follows: “If we want that tomorrow will not always be already too late, anticipation must prevail over adaptation, the ethics of the future must get the better of the tyranny of urgency”. Likewise, he proposes the acceptance of two principles stated in the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (Rio, June 1994). The *principle of precaution* stipulates that in case of a risk of serious or irreversible damages the lack of absolute scientific certainty should not serve as a pretext for delaying effective measures aimed at preventing environment degradation (we might hesitate about the question of whether the principle should not rather say “in case of risk of serious *and* irreversible damages”). The *polluter-payer principle* stipulates that the polluter must, in principle, bear the cost of the pollution, with a concern for the public interest and without distorting international trade and investment (the meaning and intent of the last clause might be discussed).

9. *Solidarity towards future generations – the social environment*

Immediately after the paragraphs on ecology, *Centesimus annus* (38) stresses the importance of the social environment. “In addition to the irrational destruction of the natural environment, we must also mention the more serious destruction of the *human environment*, something which is by no means receiving the attention it deserves. ... Man is also conditioned by the social structure in which he lives, by the education he has received and by his environment. These elements can either help or hinder his living in accordance with the truth. The decisions which create a human environment can give rise to specific structures of sin which impede the full realization of those who are in any way oppressed by them. To destroy such structures and replace them with more authentic forms of living in community is a task which demands courage and patience”. Clearly the objective is a matter for intergenerational solidarity. Without repeating what was earlier said of the questions concerning the family, to which the encyclical directly turns, we shall consider here other teachings of the Church, which also bear on the slow construction of the social environment.

⁴*Les dimensions sociales de la foi*, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2000.

Gaudium et spes well defined the objective to be assigned to this construction. Section 63 states: "Man is the source, the center, and the purpose of all economic and social life". Section 64 specifies: "Economic activity is to be carried on according to its own methods and laws within the limits of the moral order, so that God's plan for mankind may be realized". Section 65 adds: "Economic development must remain under man's determination and must not be left to the judgment of a few men or groups possessing too much economic power or of the political community alone. ... Citizens, on the other hand, should remember that it is their right and duty, which is also to be recognized by the civil authority, to contribute to the true progress of their own community according to their ability". Section 66 further specifies: "To satisfy the demands of justice and equity ... an end must be put to the tremendous economico-social disparities".

In 1965 this objective already appeared rather demanding. Many in 2002 find it even more demanding. Hence the unescapable question: in what way are the economic and social structures of this world responsible for the fact that our societies find it so difficult to move toward an objective to which so many women and men seem to adhere? And this question was already posed before *Rerum novarum*. Fifty years ago a fairly large consensus prevailed in favour of structures which, while leaving ample room to the market economy, also gave important social responsibilities to the state. Those were the days of the construction of the welfare state, whose adequacy is today often questioned, at least as regards its methods. What is now the social doctrine of the Church on this issue?

Again, *Centesimus annus* provides the most embracing and recent formulation. I am not going to follow it closely here but rather to recall its main propositions. So doing I shall best exhibit the tensions between the terms of which decisions have to be taken by those who want to apply the Social Doctrine. Indeed, it is precisely in relation to these tensions that the elements brought by our disciplines could be most useful to the Church. Our attention must be geared mainly toward chapter IV, dealing with private property and the universal destination of goods, and chapter V, on the state and the culture.

Sections 30 to 35 mainly recall the principles set out in *Rerum novarum* about the natural character of the right to private property, subject, however, to the constraint of having regard for the common destination of goods ("God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone" 31). These sections add two meaningful complements. The first emphasizes the value of the entre-

preneurial spirit and states that “the modern *business economy* has positive aspects” (32), but also points out “the risks and problems connected with this kind of process” with in particular new forms of inhuman exploitation (33). Secondly, the text later states: “Profit is a regulator of the life of a business, but it is not the only one; *other human and moral factors* must also be considered which, in the long term, are at least equally important for the life of a business” (35).

Section 42 takes a stand on capitalism. It poses the question: “Can it perhaps be said that capitalism is the victorious social system? ... Is this the model which ought to be proposed?” To which the answer is: “If by ‘capitalism’ is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative. ... But if by ‘capitalism’ is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative”.

After section 40, which states “It is the task of the State to provide for the defence and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces”, section 48 considers the role of the state in the economic sector: “Economic activity, especially the activity of a market economy, cannot be conducted in an institutional, juridical or political vacuum. ... The State has the further right to intervene when particular monopolies create delays or obstacles to development. ... In recent years the range of such interventions has vastly expanded, to the point of creating a new type of State, the so-called ‘Welfare State’. This has happened in some countries in order to respond better to many needs and demands, by remedying forms of poverty and deprivation unworthy of the human person. However, excesses and abuses, especially in recent years, have provoked very harsh criticisms of the Welfare State, dubbed the ‘Social Assistance State’”. The following texts in the encyclical partly accepts this criticism.

“The Church values the democratic system. ... Authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person” (46). “The Church respects *the legitimate autonomy of the democratic order* and is not entitled to express preferences for this or that institutional or constitutional solution. Her contribution to the

political order is precisely her vision of the dignity of the person revealed in all its fullness in the mystery of the Incarnate Word” (47).

Lastly, the social environment will depend on the culture that we pass on to future generations. Will we have contributed to valuing and enriching all the cultural wealth that we have received? Asking the question suffices to reveal its importance. *Centesimus annus* reminds us of this: “All human activity takes place within a culture and interacts with culture. For an adequate formation of a culture, the involvement of the whole man is required. ... Thus the first and most important task is accomplished within man’s heart. The way in which he is involved in building his own future depends on the understanding he has of himself and of his own destiny. It is on this level that *the Church’s specific and decisive contribution to true culture* is to be found. ... The Church renders this service to human society *by preaching the truth about the creation of the world*, which God has placed in human hands so that people may make it fruitful and more perfect through their work; and *by preaching the truth about the Redemption*, whereby the Son of God has saved mankind and at the same time has united all people, making them responsible for one another” (51). “For [peace] to happen, *a great effort must be made to enhance mutual understanding and knowledge, and to increase the sensitivity of consciences*. ... The poor – be they individuals or nations – need to be provided with realistic opportunities. Creating such conditions calls for a *concerted worldwide effort to promote development*, an effort which also involves sacrificing the positions of income and of power enjoyed by the more developed economies” (52).