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# THE USE OF PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT: THE CASE OF *GAUDIUM ET SPES*

REVEREND JOSEPH W. KOTERSKI, S.J.†

It is common to find individuals who are very attracted to questions of social justice and others quite uninterested, or even suspicious.<sup>1</sup> At both extremes there are dangers to avoid. On the one hand, Catholicism may never be reduced to the concerns of “the social gospel” apart from the rest of the faith.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the Church’s social teachings, especially in the clear articulation given by recent popes and the Second Vatican Council, are not peripheral to the faith, not something purely optional, as if the essence of Catholicism were a matter of spirituality to the exclusion of morality.<sup>3</sup> Like the rest of Catholic moral theology, Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has roots both in revelation and reason,<sup>4</sup> and anyone interested in

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<sup>1</sup> See Joseph Koterski, S.J., *Philosophy and Catholic Social Thought*, 11 SEMINARY J. 42 (2005) for a shorter version of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> See PAUL VI, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII NUNTIANDI* ¶ 32 (1975) [hereinafter *EVANGELII NUNTIANDI*].

<sup>3</sup> See *id.* ¶ 5 (“[T]he Gospel message is not an optional contribution for the Church.”).

<sup>4</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., *Catholic Social Teaching and American Legal Practice*, 30 FORDHAM URB. L.J. 277, 279 (2002); see also CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT: THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE 1–2 (David J. O’Brien & Thomas A. Shannon eds., 1992) (noting the social and political contexts influencing modern CST development and locating its genesis in “the person and message of Jesus”); William J. Byron, S.J., *The Future of Catholic Social Thought*, 42 CATH. U. L. REV. 557, 557–

making CST better known and understood should become thoroughly acquainted with both the philosophical and theological aspects of this body of thought. Those already interested in the fullness of Catholic Social Teaching need to become aware that some people will find social concerns more palatable than other demands of the Catholic religion; likewise, they will encounter other people who have greater taste for religious devotions and spirituality than for Catholic social service programs. In fact, Catholicism has a well-developed—and still growing—body of teaching about social justice and the proper ordering of society that flows directly from the encounter of the Gospel and its morality with the problems of living in society.<sup>5</sup>

Although this essay is focused on the philosophical principles of CST, with special attention to *Gaudium et Spes* during this year, the fortieth anniversary of that document, it is understood that there is also need for study of the social sciences and moral theology beyond anything that will be covered here. In advancing a social doctrine, the Church aims not merely to state the relevant principles clearly but also to help in the formation of consciences and habits of sound prudential judgment. The practical aspects of CST simply cannot be learned adequately apart from the social sciences and the cultivation of critical reflection about what is feasible in concrete situations. Notwithstanding the importance of technical and prudential factors, knowledge about CST can never simply be reduced to practical experience or to expertise in the social sciences; explicit theological and philosophical formation is required to make sound analyses and arguments on this subject.<sup>6</sup>

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59 (1993) (“Out of the experience of all and the perceptive analysis of those whose minds are trained to see significant social problems . . . the magisterium of the Church can, if it so chooses to do so, shape and proclaim its social doctrine in the years ahead.”).

<sup>5</sup> See Dulles, *supra* note 4, at 279 (describing CST as “a body of social teaching that is intended to contribute to the formation of a society marked by peace, concord, and justice toward all”).

<sup>6</sup> See CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, GUIDELINES FOR THE STUDY AND TEACHING OF THE CHURCH’S SOCIAL DOCTRINE IN THE FORMATION OF PRIESTS ¶¶ 7–10 (1988); see also Dulles, *supra* note 4, at 278–79; NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, PROGRAM OF PRIESTLY FORMATION 39–41 (5th ed. 1993) (reaffirming the importance of a sound philosophical education for seminarians).

## REASONS FOR APPEALING TO PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

It is precisely by reason of expertise about human nature that the Church, in light of what has been revealed by Christ, claims to be justified in speaking authoritatively about social questions.<sup>7</sup> The ethical principles relevant for social morality transcend utilitarian calculations of a technical nature, and theology and philosophy play an indispensable role in the articulation and defense of these fundamental moral principles.

The distinctly theological dimensions of CST include the vision of the human being as made in the image of God,<sup>8</sup> the special obligations in charity incumbent on Christians to act as the brothers and sisters of Christ that they have become by baptism,<sup>9</sup> and the need to love one's neighbor as oneself, according to the understanding of neighbor made clear by the parable of the Good Samaritan.<sup>10</sup> Once one recognizes that one's life is not for storing up earthly goods but heavenly ones,<sup>11</sup> one can more easily gain a freedom in the spirit for the proper use of these earthly goods.<sup>12</sup> It was in this spirit that the Second Vatican Council and the encyclicals of Pope Paul VI so firmly

<sup>7</sup> See CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ¶¶ 2419–25 (2d ed. 1997); PIUS XI, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO* ¶ 41 (1931) [hereinafter *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*]; VATICAN COUNCIL II, PASTORAL CONSTITUTION *GAUDIUM ET SPES* ¶¶ 4, 22 (1965) [hereinafter *GAUDIUM ET SPES*]; PAUL VI, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO* ¶ 13 (1967) [hereinafter *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO*]; JOHN PAUL II, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS* ¶ 7 (1987); JOHN PAUL II, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *CENTESIMUS ANNUS* ¶¶ 53–58 (1991) [hereinafter *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*].

<sup>8</sup> Not only do CST documents regularly invoke the doctrine that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, but they also argue against the claims that religion is oppressive to human freedom and self-realization and that only atheism guarantees authentic human freedom. See *Genesis* 1:26 (New American); see, e.g., LEO XIII, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *RERUM NOVARUM* ¶ 42 (1891) [hereinafter *RERUM NOVARUM*]; *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 120, 130–35; JOHN XXIII, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *MATER ET MAGISTRA* ¶¶ 205–11 (1961) [hereinafter *MATER ET MAGISTRA*]; JOHN XXIII, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *PACEM IN TERRIS* ¶¶ 37–38 (1963) [hereinafter *PACEM IN TERRIS*]; *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 12–21; *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 13–14.

<sup>9</sup> See CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 1889, 1997; JOHN PAUL II, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *LABOREM EXERCENS* ¶ 26 (1981) [hereinafter *LABOREM EXERCENS*].

<sup>10</sup> See *Luke* 10:29–37 (New American); CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, *supra* note 7, ¶ 2196.

<sup>11</sup> See *Luke* 12:13–21; *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶ 18.

<sup>12</sup> See CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 1741–42; *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 12–20.

asserted the connection between working for development of underdeveloped peoples and credibility in evangelization.<sup>13</sup>

Much more can, and should, be said about the properly theological elements of training in CST, but the task of this paper is to focus on philosophical concerns. Not everyone is likely to share identical religious, biblical, or ecclesial commitments concerning questions of social justice and social order. Hence, there will frequently be need to make arguments for sound social policies based on principles that do not require a specific religious faith to be compelling in practical matters. It will be enough for the sake of common action if these principles are recognized as true by people of goodwill because of our common humanity. Even in dealings with our co-religionists, there will be areas where the social applications of revelation or tradition may not yet be as clear as we might like, or where there may not yet be consensus about how best to proceed. Catholic moral theology in general, and not just in the area of social thought, has long insisted that philosophical reason is a reliable and crucial partner in the enterprise.<sup>14</sup> Although faith comes first in the pairing of faith and reason,<sup>15</sup> there is a great role for philosophical reasoning to play. The ethical principles that are fundamental for good social order are rational in nature, and in the public square it may be helpful to articulate and defend them on philosophical grounds, even if one's deepest reason for holding them is religious in character.

### HUMAN DIGNITY

Respect for human dignity is the foundation of CST's more specific principles.<sup>16</sup> The treatment given to this subject in all the major documents exemplifies the stereophonic approach to philosophy and theology typical of Catholic thought. When asked how to best make the case for a social order that respects the dignity of each human person, the strongest reason may be that

<sup>13</sup> See *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 44; *EVANGELII NUNTIANDI*, *supra* note 2, ¶¶ 15, 31.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., JOHN PAUL II, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *FIDES ET RATIO* ¶¶ 38–39 (1998) [hereinafter *FIDES ET RATIO*] (tracing the role of philosophy in the development of Christian theology).

<sup>15</sup> It is not merely rhetorical custom but a sound instinct that tends to place faith before reason, as in the recent encyclical, *FIDES ET RATIO*. *Id.* ¶ 42.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., *MATER ET MAGISTRA*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 82–83; *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 12–22; *LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 9, ¶¶ 4–10.

each human being is made in the image of God. Therefore, human beings, taken individually and societally, ought to be respected out of reverence for the God in whose image we are made and who has commanded this respect. The need to respect the dignity of each human being is also accessible philosophically. It may be helpful to use a more philosophical approach, especially in discussion with those who are hostile to, or suspicious of, organized religion or even with certain Christians—high school or college students, for instance, who may be cynical about their religion, or just testing it, or perhaps overly enamored with views they have heard from secular teachers or acquired by osmosis from their culture.

To appreciate the meaning of human dignity and its ethical implications philosophically may require considerable patience in making a sustained rational argument for the human person as different in kind from any other animal, as irreducible to our biochemical constituents or our biologically-based psychological drives and impulses, and as something more important than an anonymous element within mass culture. In the division of labors within a philosophy curriculum, this is the province of a sound course on the philosophy of the human person—one that explores the distinctive features of human life that simply cannot be explained by facile reductionism. It is necessary to meet the challenges and objections raised by those regarding the claim that human beings are different in kind and wholly distinct in value as if this was merely a special pleading. The possible approaches are many; human language, for instance, is not just different in degree of sophistication from even the most complicated forms of animal communication, but different in kind.<sup>17</sup> The specifically human forms of commitment and promise-keeping that are indispensable to any social order are not merely instinctive or emotional bonds but the results of free choices and thus matters of moral responsibility.<sup>18</sup> Unlike the animal world, human sexuality is not merely a matter of estrus and biochemical stimulation; it involves persons, and the sexual relations of persons need to be mediated by words if the persons are to mean what the actions by their very natures are saying

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<sup>17</sup> See JC Smith, *Machine Intelligence and Legal Reasoning*, 73 CHI.-KENT L. REV. 277, 281–82 (1998) (explaining that animal communication is structured like a code rather than a language).

<sup>18</sup> See generally GUY MANSINI, PROMISING AND THE GOOD (2005).

and if the actions are sincerely to say what the persons involved really mean.<sup>19</sup> What these and many other areas of human life exhibit upon philosophical reflection is the genuine distinctiveness of personhood from all other types of being. It will also be important for courses on CST to draw upon insights from elsewhere in the philosophical curriculum: in epistemology, by considering the objectivity of truth, for instance, and the criteria for assessing truth-claims in the practical order; in ethics, the norms of justice and the responsibility that flow from free choice; in political philosophy, the distinction between authority and the power at its disposal as well as the procedures for the detection of ideological efforts to reduce questions of principle to questions of mere power by the deconstructive techniques of such masters of suspicion as Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche.<sup>20</sup>

#### THE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

What philosophical argumentation can help CST to erect on the foundations of respect for human dignity is a solid defense of certain crucial social principles. The series of papal and conciliar statements of the past century, from *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 through Pope John Paul II's 1991 *Centesimus Annus*, has articulated a number of such principles, including the right to private property,<sup>21</sup> and concomitantly, the universal destination of the goods of this world;<sup>22</sup> the duty of obedience to legitimate authority, and with it, the double-edged principle of subsidiarity;<sup>23</sup> the duty of governments to work for the common good,<sup>24</sup> and correlatively the principle of solidarity<sup>25</sup> and the right

<sup>19</sup> PAUL M. QUAY, S.J., *THE CHRISTIAN MEANING OF HUMAN SEXUALITY* (1988).

<sup>20</sup> MEROLD WESTPHAL, *SUSPICION AND FAITH: THE RELIGIOUS USES OF MODERN ATHEISM* (1993).

<sup>21</sup> See *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 4–8; *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 44–52; *MATER ET MAGISTRA*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 109–12; *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 30.

<sup>22</sup> See *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶ 19; *MATER ET MAGISTRA*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 119–22; *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 69; *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 22–24; *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 30–43.

<sup>23</sup> See *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 80; *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 8, ¶ 140; *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 15.

<sup>24</sup> See *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 28–29; *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 49; *MATER ET MAGISTRA*, *supra* note 8, ¶ 20; *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 24, ¶¶ 53–74.

<sup>25</sup> See *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 8, ¶ 98; *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO*, *supra*

to authentic human development.<sup>26</sup> As its chief philosophical pillars, CST has relied especially upon natural law theory and, to an important but lesser extent, personalism. The tradition of natural law morality has its roots in ancient Stoicism and Roman law and has seen contemporary applications in the civil rights movement and the Nuremberg Trials, but its most prominent exposition comes from Thomas Aquinas, whose thought has been an indispensable support for the modern articulation of CST.<sup>27</sup> Personalism is the name for a movement in contemporary philosophy that Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II have used extensively in their contributions to Catholic thought about the great social questions.<sup>28</sup> By its focus on the human person, this approach offers the benefit of arguments that may have more immediate appeal than do natural law arguments, if only because one appears to carry less metaphysical baggage (such as detailed investigation of teleology and natural function). Especially when one is working in the realm of international law, or operating politically in a pluralistic society where there is little patience for metaphysics, it may prove fruitful to make one's arguments about distributive justice and the social order on the tenet that all persons are moral subjects, each with certain inalienable rights. But despite the apparent rhetorical advantages of this approach, the popes appear to have chosen wisely not to let their case rest on personalism alone but always to develop it in tandem with natural law considerations.<sup>29</sup> It is easy to see the reason for this when one considers the problem of precisely how one should properly define "person." On a wide range of social issues, including the protection of the unborn from abortion, of defective children from infanticide, of immigrants from racists, and of the senile and the comatose from deprivation of care, there are often virtually interminable debates about how

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note 7, ¶ 43; *LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 9, ¶ 8; and the entirety, with special focus on ¶¶ 38–40, of *SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 38–40.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., *POPULORUM PROGRESSIO*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 12–21; *SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 27–34.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 6–8; *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 8–38; *LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 9, ¶ 14.

<sup>28</sup> Pope Paul VI had enormous esteem for the personalism of Jacques Maritain. See Jacques Maritain, *THE PERSON AND THE COMMON GOOD* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1947, 1955); see also *LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 9, ¶ 15; *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 13.

<sup>29</sup> See *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 8–10; *LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 9, ¶ 16



to define personhood, particularly when one party or another finds it advantageous to rule some individuals whose existence is inconvenient out of the protected class of persons in the effort to solve some "social problem."<sup>30</sup> The resolution of these questions about personhood invariably requires a return to considerations about human nature. In learning how to make these arguments, it will be crucial for students to appreciate that reliance on the functional definitions for personhood in terms of rationality or self-consciousness that are useful in helping to differentiate healthy mature adults of the human species from healthy mature adults of any other species do not suffice as non-arbitrary demarcation-criteria for ruling individuals in or out of the species.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL LAW THEORY FOR CST PRINCIPLES

Natural law argumentation is prominent in all the documents of the CST tradition from *Rerum Novarum* on.<sup>31</sup> It may well have been a desire to have Thomistic natural law's robust appeal to reason as discovering moral norms within human nature that led Pope Leo to call for the renewal of Thomism in his 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*.<sup>32</sup> Confronted by the rise of socialism and communism, Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI mounted a defense of the right of property, not by treating it in Locke's manner as an abstract right of individuals to do what they like with what they have appropriated and made more valuable by their labor, but with a strong sense of the demands of morality for its proper use.<sup>33</sup> They follow the Thomistic reasoning that rights flow from duties.<sup>34</sup> Because all human beings have by nature a duty to care not only for their own lives but for their families and dependents, they must have the right to acquire property sufficient to be able to carry out their

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<sup>30</sup> See *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 12–22; *LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 9, ¶ 6; *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 12–13.

<sup>31</sup> See *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 6–8; *PACEM IN TERRIS*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 8–38; *LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 9, ¶ 14.

<sup>32</sup> LEO XIII, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *AETERNI PATRIS* ¶¶ 25–31 (1879) [hereinafter *AETERNI PATRIS*].

<sup>33</sup> *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 4–9; *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 42–49.

<sup>34</sup> *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 6–9; *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 49.

duties.<sup>35</sup> The correlative principle of solidarity makes it possible for them also to argue for the legitimacy of labor unions, and even of labor strikes under some conditions,<sup>36</sup> not on the Marxist logic that class warfare is inevitable, but on the natural law grounds that justice requires the payment of fair wages. Given the intrinsically social dimensions of human nature, they urge that voluntary associations formed for the pursuit of the common good such as labor unions are indispensable for securing the conditions in which laborers can provide for themselves and their families.<sup>37</sup> Throughout this tradition, CST documents invariably make the case that family life is the foundation for society.<sup>38</sup> Pope Pius XI, for instance, conjoins these points when he extends the notion of a “just wage” to the idea of a family wage.<sup>39</sup> This arises out of a recognition that CST must think of human beings not as mere individuals in the *laissez faire* marketplace of labor as subject to the interplay of supply and demand,<sup>40</sup> but as intrinsically social, first by reason of membership in families and by extension as participants in various orders of society. The virtue of justice requires that governments promote the common good, including the improvement of wages and working conditions, so as to ensure the stability of family life and the conditions needed for genuine human development, such as access to education, civic friendships, and rest.

Correlative with the papal defense of the right of private property is the doctrine of the universal destination of goods.

<sup>35</sup> *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶ 13; *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 45–48.

<sup>36</sup> *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 31–38. For John Paul II’s reflections on this subject, see *LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 9, ¶¶ 16–23, with particular emphasis on ¶ 20.

<sup>37</sup> *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 48–57; *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 35–37.

<sup>38</sup> See *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶ 32 (“[A] State chiefly prospers and thrives through . . . well-regulated family life . . . .”); *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 47 (“The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family.”); *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 39 (“The first and fundamental structure for ‘human ecology’ is the family . . . .”).

<sup>39</sup> See *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 70–74; see also *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶ 34; *MATER ET MAGISTRA*, *supra* note 8, ¶¶ 68, 71, 74, 192–94.

<sup>40</sup> See *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 83; see also *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶ 15; *LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 9, ¶¶ 12–15; *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 42.

CST documents make special use of Aquinas's view that God created the goods of this world for common human benefit.<sup>41</sup> While individuals are justified in acquiring property and enhancing the value of what they cultivate, divine providence has made the goods of this world for the needs of all people.<sup>42</sup> Hence, a person in genuine need may have a more fundamental claim than a person whose needs are already satisfied. By the careful attention paid to the genuine demands of distributive justice, the documents avoid both an abstract commitment to the unrestrained right to amass private property, as if one's use of the goods of this earth were indifferent to genuine human needs, and a disregard for the right to acquire the private property that one needs to take care of one's duties.

Further, and interconnected with the above two points, CST champions the principles of authentic human development and of subsidiarity.<sup>43</sup> Authentic human development must include, but cannot be limited to, material development. The full-fledged Catholic sense of development includes the person's physical, emotional, and intellectual growth, the maturation of a sense of moral responsibility, growth in the virtues and the ability to give and receive love, to make a life commitment that will enable the formation of families, and above all to grow in knowledge and love of God.<sup>44</sup>

The principles of subsidiarity, first articulated explicitly by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno*, serve to guide thinking about the appropriate level of decision-making.<sup>45</sup> It is based on an understanding of the human being as an irreducibly unique person and as intrinsically ordered to family life and to society.<sup>46</sup> In a sense, the principle of subsidiarity is a two-edged sword: Decisions that can be better made at a lower level of organization should not be reserved to higher levels of authority, but, on the other hand, higher levels of authority should recognize and honor the need to act for the common good where lower levels of

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<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., *RERUM NOVARUM*, *supra* note 8, ¶ 33 (quoting St. Thomas Aquinas).

<sup>42</sup> See *id.* ¶ 8 ("God gave the earth for the use and enjoyment of the whole human race . . . . [T]he earth, even though apportioned among private owners, ceases not thereby to minister to the needs of all . . . .").

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 58, 80.

<sup>44</sup> See *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 26.

<sup>45</sup> See *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 80.

<sup>46</sup> See *id.* ¶¶ 71, 84 (discussing the proper ordering of family life and industry).

organization cannot be as effective.<sup>47</sup> The goal of this carefully balanced principle is thus to enhance both the common good, by ensuring that decision-making happens at effective levels, and the legitimate freedom for decision-making that tends to ennoble the individual person and social groups, whose legitimate freedom for self-determination it protects.<sup>48</sup> It is, of course, a part of human nature that one tends to be more responsible for the decisions that one makes, and that one takes greater care of what is one's own (one's property, one's reputation, one's family, one's community).

#### GAUDIUM ET SPES AND CST

The four chapters that constitute the first part of *Gaudium et Spes* present a vision of the moral life.<sup>49</sup> The five chapters that together make up its second part address a number of current moral problems under the headings of marriage and the family, the proper development of culture, socioeconomic life, political life, and questions of peace and disarmament.<sup>50</sup> In order to focus on the document's use of philosophical principles, I need to pass over any number of passages that are primarily theological and scriptural, not because they are not crucial for the proper understanding of the document but only because they are not the focus of this paper. As but one example, consider the rightly famous passage in *Veritatis Splendor* ¶ 2 that Pope John Paul II so often quoted: "It is only in the mystery of the Word incarnate that light is shed on the mystery of man. . . . It is Christ, the last Adam, who fully discloses man to himself and unfolds his noble calling by revealing the mystery of the Father and the Father's love."<sup>51</sup> It is passages like this that give this entire document its strongly Christological focus, and I simply mean to take at least brief note of the incredible importance of this theme before I pass on to comments on the use of philosophical principles in the document.

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<sup>47</sup> See *id.* ¶ 80.

<sup>48</sup> See *id.* ¶ 79.

<sup>49</sup> *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 11–45.

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* ¶¶ 46–93.

<sup>51</sup> JOHN PAUL II, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *VERITATIS SPLENDOR* ¶ 2 (1993) [hereinafter *VERITATIS SPLENDOR*].

The elaborate anthropological and sociological analysis found in the first part of the document<sup>52</sup> strikes me as providing something like what any good natural law theorist would ideally want to present as the vision of human life, human nature, and human personhood that is indispensable for ethics. That is, just as philosophical anthropology depends on metaphysics, so any ethics depends in important respects on anthropology (not to mention the primacy of ethics over *laissez-faire* economics). While the document certainly does have recurrent references to theological anthropology, it also quite clearly is engaged in philosophical anthropology by virtue of its effort to address those people of good will and open mind who may not be of the household of the Faith, those who may not share our religious presuppositions, who may not be ready to assume the truths of Scripture and Revelation but who can be counted upon to join the Council in its effort to read "the signs of the times." These signs of the times include the vast number of changes (both deep-seated changes and those that are more superficial) in the social order, in public morals, in culture and attitudes, in religious practice, in technology and economic life, in communications and the media, and so on.

It strikes me as particularly significant that the adversary that the Conciliar text is again and again addressing here is the position that human nature itself changes and has changed, and that for this reason that there can be no unchanging or objective morality and certainly no absolute or exceptionless moral norms.<sup>53</sup> Historicity, in short, seems to imply the relativity of moral truth, and it is for precisely this reason that the Council apparently felt the need to address the many ways in which the world has been changing, so as to affirm against the view that human nature has changed, that it has not changed. Not only does the Council bring to bear the theological and revealed notion that Christ, "the perfect man," reveals to human persons what human nature can and should be,<sup>54</sup> but also that there is an abiding human nature—the very claim that scholastic natural

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<sup>52</sup> See *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 23–39.

<sup>53</sup> See *id.* ¶¶ 6–10 ("The Church also maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, Who is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever."); *id.* ¶ 40 ("[T]he Church can anchor the dignity of human nature against all tides of opinion . . .").

<sup>54</sup> *Id.* ¶¶ 22, 41.

law theory has perennially made. Sin and grace, as it were, have quite a history, but the human constitution that is the battleground for sin and grace has an abiding character on which the Council can ask the readers of this document, whatever their own commitments, to reflect, so as to see the permanent moral demands of the natural law for how human beings ought to choose their actions and how they ought to form and reform their societies so as to ensure the protection of human persons, their marriages and families, their social associations and their rights. For the Council, the vast amount of change that can be catalogued testifies not to a change in human nature, but to certain changes in how we understand the abiding needs of human nature and especially to a deep awareness of the changing social challenges that need to be met in order to respect human nature and human dignity.

There is considerable philosophical sophistication in the document's treatment of human nature. Not only does the document review and affirm the unity of matter and spirit and of body and soul in each person, but it takes up the gauntlet of inadequate anthropologies by criticizing materialist reductions of the human person and the perversity of anthropological dualists, those who would try to distinguish between human *being* and human *personhood*.<sup>55</sup> The text of *Gaudium et Spes* at several points takes up the disputed question of human freedom—the nature and proper description of freedom, genuine and faulty notions of autonomy, and the legitimate and proper goals of free choice.<sup>56</sup> In many ways, this document seems to me to anticipate some of the great themes of the second chapter of John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor*.<sup>57</sup> In this section, we also find the Council Fathers affirming the intrinsically social character of human nature, a point that is, as we have seen, absolutely crucial to Catholic Social Thought, for the human person “achieves integral fulfillment only in the family, social life, and the political community.”<sup>58</sup> These insights, in turn, justify the conclusion that society is not, as it tends to be for many political theorists, only a

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<sup>55</sup> See *id.* ¶ 26.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., *id.* ¶¶ 13, 16, 37–39.

<sup>57</sup> *VERITATIS SPLENDOR*, *supra* note 51, ¶¶ 31–53 (examining various aspects of human freedom).

<sup>58</sup> Mark S. Latkovic, S.T.D., *Gaudium et spes*, Part I's Vision of the Moral Life, Address at the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Annual Convention: “Vatican Council II after 40 Years” 14 (Sept. 23–25, 2005).

necessary evil or some artificial construct by virtue of a social contract.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, there are important sections devoted to the differences between male and female and their indispensable complementarity—points that become crucial for the normative comments in the second part about the morality of marriage, family, and society.

In a very direct appropriation of Thomistic natural law theory, the Council has an important section on conscience in general and on the need for human beings to follow certain fundamental moral principles of divine origin that come to be known through the conscience.<sup>60</sup> Not only does *Gaudium et Spes* teach that “the more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality[.]”<sup>61</sup> but it also makes considerable use of this notion in its later discussion of sexual ethics and marriage in ¶51, where it states that decisions about sexual activity and the regulation of the number and spacing of births depend not just on a “sincere intention[] or on an evaluation of motives,”<sup>62</sup> but also on “objective standards” that in turn need to be “based on the nature of the human person and his acts”<sup>63</sup> as well as on the eternal life that each human person is called to share.<sup>64</sup>

Likewise, within the chapter on human community, the Council employs any number of other concepts and themes that are typical and distinctive of the natural law tradition, including the correlation of duties and rights, inviolable human dignity, shared humanity, and the demands of the common good.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the third chapter of the second part on socioeconomic life is deeply in harmony with the previous tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, not only in its general claim that the inviolable dignity of the human person must be honored in the economic realm,<sup>66</sup> but in its rather technical analyses of topics like

<sup>59</sup> See *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 25; see also *id.* ¶ 74 (noting that “political community and public authority are founded on human nature”).

<sup>60</sup> See *id.* ¶ 16.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> *Id.* ¶ 51.

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*

<sup>64</sup> The Latin text of ¶ 51 reads: “obiectivis criteriis, ex personae eiusdemque actuum natura desumptis.” *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶ 51.

<sup>65</sup> See *id.* ¶¶ 24–31.

<sup>66</sup> See *id.* ¶ 63.

productivity, labor, property ownership, and distributive justice. There is, for instance, a vigorous case made that theories that obstruct economic and social reform in the name of a false liberty and a view of *laissez faire* economics, as if moral principles were irrelevant, should be treated as erroneous, as should theories that subordinate the basic needs of individuals to the collective organization of production.<sup>67</sup> There is a healthy respect for the economic laws of the market and for the technical intricacies of efficient decision-making processes in local, national, and world economies, but as is very typical of Catholic Social Teaching, the document repeatedly insists that there are moral norms that need to be respected and that may never be violated.<sup>68</sup> On the topic of property and private ownership, for instance, there is considerable attention given (very much in the natural law tradition of moral argumentation) to the very purpose of private property (namely, to provide individuals with a kind of independence that enhances their ability to do their duties to their dependence and that extends their freedom).<sup>69</sup> But, always correlated with this defense of private property, *Gaudium et Spes* joins in adding a sense of the social demands on private property that come from the common good and the communal purpose of all earthly goods.<sup>70</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The Church's social doctrine makes profound and sustained use of philosophical principles. This usage is evident throughout the documentary tradition that runs from *Rerum Novarum* through *Gaudium et Spes* and to *Centesimus Annus*, and we can expect it to continue. It is by the careful employment of philosophical concepts and the sorts of argument that are typical of the natural law tradition and of personalism that there can be adequate explanation and defense of the various claims that are important to Catholic Social Thought, not only by an appeal to the authority of the Church, but also in terms that are readily

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<sup>67</sup> See *id.* ¶ 65 ("Growth is not to be left solely to a kind of mechanical course of the economic activity of individuals, nor to the authority of government.").

<sup>68</sup> See *id.* ¶ 64 ("[E]conomic 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.").

<sup>69</sup> See *id.* ¶ 71.

<sup>70</sup> See *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, *supra* note 7, ¶¶ 70–71.



intelligible for broader audiences and that can be made cogent and compelling to those of open mind and good will.