

METHOD IN THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

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The Problem *

When Leo XIII dealt with the labour question, he raised the question and tried to solve it on the basis of a theory of society, even if such a theory was more implied rather than explicitly stated. Pius XI was perhaps even more conscious than his predecessor of the need to approach the labour question in the context of an explicit social theory.⁽¹⁾ Much of the criticism that was levelled in the sixties against the earlier social teaching tradition in the Catholic Church centred on the difficulties inherent in the concept of social systems in general.⁽²⁾ It was pointed out that human life is too complex a reality to fit any conceptual scheme and that history is continuously bringing new insights and technical possibilities which necessitate a critical and open attitude toward social systems.

That history is not a static but a dynamic reality was one of the philosophical premises of Vatican II. But if the new historical consciousness, characteristic of conciliar theology, revealed the limitations of the earlier social teaching of the Church, a critical concept of history, underlying the social teaching of the Church, after the Council, seems to be giving rise to a new method in the social teaching of the Church.

The methodological problems which were raised with regard to the

* Research for the following essay has been carried out mostly in Tübingen, Germany, in the course of a Fellowship granted by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

1 Oswald von Nell-Breuning notes that while *Rerum Novarum* limits itself to the labour question, *Quadragesimo Anno* deals with a broader theme, namely the reconstruction of the whole social order. Cf. *Soziallehre der Kirche: Erläuterungen der lehrämlichen Dokumente*, Wien, 2, Aufl., 1978, p. 46. The problem however, is that the approach to the labour question is itself conditioned by the concept of society underlying the first two major social encyclicals.

2 Such criticism was usually made in connection with the concept of the social doctrine of the Church. The notion of "doctrine", it was argued, gave the impression that the social teaching of the Church had only a doctrinal aspect, whereas it had actually other aspects as well, above all, a historical one which is decisive. On this point, see: Bartolomeo Sorge, "E' Superato il concetto tradizionale di dottrina sociale della Chiesa?" *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 119:2825 (1968), 423-436; Marie-Dominique Chenu', *La "Doctrina Sociale" de l'Eglise Comme Ideologie*, Paris, 1979, pp. 7-13. Chenu' notes that the re-introduction of the expression, "social doctrine", in *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76 is due to an unauthorised intervention, since it has been made after the promulgation of the text. Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 88.

social teaching of the Church have not been really answered. This has been mainly due to the opposing ways in which the problem of faith and social action is very often posed. In the context of the theology of liberation, where such a problem is actually central, the question usually takes this form: Which kind of utopia is capable to express the right critical stance *vis-à-vis* a situation like that existing in Latin America and to evoke a new image of man and society in those circumstances? Or which kind of ideology is more likely to provide a concrete solution to the economic, political and social problems in the Latin American continent?⁽³⁾ The theology of liberation is framing the question in these terms, precisely because it assumes that there cannot be a short-cut road from faith to social action or *vice versa*. It is argued that social action always involves a theory of man and society. This is a theory or view of man and society which conveys much that is not easily conceptualizable, for it is, partly at least, the product of the imagination (utopia) or it is a group aspiration (ideology). Contrary to this position, it is stated today, much more than it used to be in the past, that faith cannot be reduced to or identified with any social system, utopia or ideology.⁽⁴⁾

Now the more recent social teaching of the Church is trying to avoid the identification of the Christian message with any particular social system. In fact, the Church nowadays is seeking to present a new type of social teaching — a teaching which “calls for a constant revision of all systems according to the criterion of the dignity of the human person”.⁽⁵⁾ A social teaching of this kind involves, first of all, a critical re-examination of the preceding social tradition, including the position of Vatican II, for the Council is not altogether free from what may be called ideological elements. The Council was, of course, very cautious not to propose any specific system as a once-for-all answer to the various social problems of the day. Nevertheless, it presupposed a developmental view of history which made its analysis of the situation

3 Cf. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. and edit. by Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, London, 2nd. impr. 1975; Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. by John Drury, Dublin, 1977.

While Gutierrez prefers to speak of “utopia”, Segundo prefers to speak of “ideology” in relating faith to social action. For a comprehensive analysis of the various currents in liberation theology and similar theological trends in Europe, see: Alfred Fierro, *The Militant Gospel: An Analysis of Contemporary Political Theologies*, trans. by John Drury, London, 1977.

4 Cf. Walter Kasper, “Theologische Bestimmung der Menschenrechte im neuzeitlichen Bewußtsein von Freiheit und Geschichte” in *Modernes Freiheitsethos und christlicher Glaube*, ed. by Johannes Schwartländer, München, 1981, 285 — 302, pp. 296-297.

5 John Paul II, Address to Participants in the symposium which was organized by the Pontifical Commission, *Iustitia et Pax*, in Rome between the 3rd and 5th, April, 1982 and now published along with the contribution of the various participants in a book entitled: *Rerum Novarum Laborem Exercens 2000*, 43-45, p. 45.

rather one-sided and distorted in some respects. Accordingly, the solution which it proposed, on a tentative basis, looks dated and sounds somehow irrelevant to people passing through a different experience.

When one studies the evolution of the social teaching of the Church from *Rerum Novarum* (1891) to *Laborem Exercens* (1981), one finds that by and large the Church always approached the labour question and other social problems on the basis of a specific concept of society and history. This concept was not itself deduced from revelation but it was formed in the course of history. The fact that it was found to be reconcilable with the data of revelation did not make it more Christian than other equally reconcilable, concepts of society and history. From a methodological point of view, the chief problem concerning the social teaching of the Church is its relative character. In fact, its interpretation of the social situation as well as of revelation is always filtered by some underlying concept of society and history. This is why the social teaching of the Church exhibits a controversial character in some respects and it is subject to revision.⁽⁶⁾ But right from the very start the social teaching of the Church concerned itself also with what may be called the criteria for a really human society. It took the form of a critical reflection on the fundamental principles and conditions of a truly human life and assumed that such a reflection might be found useful by those who were directly engaged in the concrete reconstruction of the social order. We shall here review the evolution of the social doctrine of the Church, while keeping in mind these two tendencies that have been mentioned.⁽⁷⁾

6 On this point, see especially: Zoltan Alszeghy SJ and Maurizio Flick SJ, "Theology of Development: A Question of Method" in *Theology Meets Progress* ed. by Philip Land, Rome, 1971, 105 — 143, pp. 128-136.

7 Among those who have contributed toward a better understanding of the method which the Church pursued in its social teaching the following should be mentioned: Oswald von Nell-Breuning, *Mitbestimmung — Wer Mit Wem?* Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 1969, pp. 51, 63. The author notes a very important change of perspective between the early and later social teaching. At first, the Church regarded the right to private property as a principle of order (*Ordnungsprinzip*) and a structural element (*Strukturelement*) of society but now it is considering work as the principle on which society is built and structured. Bartolomeo Sorge, "E superato il concetto tradizionale di dottrina sociale della Chiesa?" in *Civiltà Cattolica*, 119:2825 (1968), 423-436; "Teologia e Storia nell'enciclica 'Populorum Progressio'" in *Civiltà Cattolica*, 119:2827 (1968), 8-22; "Le 'Riflessioni' del Card. Roy per il decennale della 'Pacem in Terris'" in *Civiltà Cattolica*, 124:2949 (1973), 209-221. The author distinguishes three moments in every social doctrine: a historical, an ideological or doctrinal and a political moment. In other words, the process starts with a diagnosis of the historical situation, moves to the ideological or doctrinal level, where the situation is interpreted and judged according to certain normative principles, and ends in choosing a course of action which is suitable, in the whole context, to change the situation under examination. Although

The Pre-conciliar Tradition: An Organic View of Society

Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* and Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* approached the labour question in the light of an organic concept of society. Their view of society differed radically from that which was proposed by the two major ideologies of the time, that is, liberal capitalism and socialism/communism. Historically, these two ideologies appeared as being antithetical to each other. But in principle they are two variations of the same common belief, for both of them assume that man is a creature who has been perennially struggling against nature and other fellow men. Survival can only be won at the cost of constant struggle. Marx and Engels expressed this conviction very succinctly and pointedly at the very beginning of *The Communist Manifesto*: "The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class conflict".

It is important to note that the organic image of society, on which the earlier social teaching of the Church relies, in spite of its historical conditioning, originates ultimately from a basic conviction about human nature. This is that man is created to live in harmony with himself, his fellow men and the environment. If there is conflict in the world of human beings, this is something which should not be there. A social theory, based on human nature, can, therefore, be one in which order and harmony are its essential characteristics. Besides, the solution of

these three moments are implied in every phase of the social teaching tradition, the doctrinal moment seems to have predominated in the earlier phase. Friedhelm Hengsbach, *Die Arbeit hat Vorrang: Eine Option katholischer Soziallehre*, Mainz, 1982, pp. 289-306. Hengsbach analyses the social teaching of the Church into three basic types: system-(*System-Soziallehre*), the critical (*Kritische Soziallehre*) and the action-(*Handlungs-Soziallehre*) social teaching. They focus respectively on the principle of order, on the other society, as an alternative to the existing one, and on the better solution to the critical situation under review. Broadly speaking, one can say that the first type was rather common before John XXIII but the second type was present to a certain degree also in Leo XIII and Pius XI, while the third characterizes the whole social teaching tradition, for this is essentially always action-oriented. Marie-Dominique Chenu', *La "Doctrin Sociale" de l'Eglise Comme Ideologie*, Paris, 1979. The author distinguishes between the "deductive" and the "inductive" method, characteristic of the social teaching of the Church before and after John XXIII respectively. The change of approach involved more than a change from a static to a dynamic view of man, society and the world. There was also a corresponding change in the theology of history and the formulation of a new ecclesiology which recognizes not only the primary rôle of the hierarchy in the proclamation of the Gospel and the formulation of general moral principles for the reconstruction of society but also the specific mission of the laity in the betterment of the temporal order. The approach which Chenu' takes seems to be more suitable than the others, for it takes into account the philosophical and theological issues involved on the methodological level. Nevertheless, the influence which the concept of society and history, underlying the social teaching of the Church's theological frame of mind needs to be elaborated further.

the labour question, to take one example, according to Leo XIII and Pius XI, is somehow pre-determined, because it has to satisfy the requirements of an organic concept of society to be valid. Solutions, involving the use of violence, are unacceptable, precisely because they do not fit into the *natural* structure of society; they create disorder and lead to the death of society rather than to its cure.⁽⁸⁾

Yet, when we speak of the organic concept of society, we usually have in mind something more than the principle from which such a concept has originated. This concept has had its own history. It acquired a specific historical form in pre-modern times, especially in the Middle Ages.⁽⁹⁾ Leo XIII and Pius XI assumed that the revolutions of the modern epoch, including the Industrial Revolution, dismantled the organic character of society. Their general thesis was that society had to recuperate its original form and, if necessary, to inspire itself in this work of social reconstruction from by-gone times. Pius XI was clearly enunciating this thesis when he wrote:

“... things have come to such a pass that the highly developed social life, which once flourished in a variety of associations organically linked with each other, has been damaged and all but ruined, leaving thus virtually only the individuals and the State, to the no small detriment of the State itself. Social life has entirely lost its organic form; the State, today encumbered with all the burdens once borne by those associations now destroyed, has been submerged and overwhelmed by an infinity of occupations and duties”.⁽¹⁰⁾

The collapse of society as an organic reality — a collapse which was obviously due to follow from the individualistic philosophy of free competition — destroyed social harmony and created class conflict.

8 “The great mistake made in regard to the matter now under consideration, is to make up with the notion that class is naturally hostile to class (*alterum ordinem sua sponte infensum alteri*), and that the wealthy and the working-men are intended by nature to live in mutual conflict (*quasi locupletes et proletarios ad digladiandum inter se pertinaci duello natura comparaverit*). *Rerum Novarum*, trans. by the Incorporated Catholic Truth Society from the revised Latin text published in 1931, n. 15. Similarly, Pius XI said: “The aim of social policy must therefore be the re-establishment of vocational groups. Society today still remains in a strained and therefore unstable and uncertain state, because it is founded on classes with divergent aims and hence opposed to each other, and consequently prone to enmity and strife”. *Quadragesimo Anno* trans. by the Incorporated Catholic Truth Society, 1963, n. 82. Unless otherwise stated, the English translation of Church documents will be the one given in editions published by the Incorporated Catholic Truth Society.

9 Cf. Ernst Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. I: *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen*, Tübingen, 1923, pp. 185-358.

10 *Quadragesimo Anno*, n. 78.

The Christian remedy, on the institutional level,⁽¹¹⁾ consisted basically in the restoration of the organic society, prevailing in pre-modern times. From the outset, it was meant to be a historically dated kind of society. Among its more dominant features, one should mention, in the first place, its essentially Christian framework. The constant point of reference was the idea of a *Christian society*.⁽¹²⁾ In retrospect, this position appears a highly controversial one, since, sociologically speaking, society in our century can by no stretch of the imagination be described as Christian, even if remnants of its Christian heritage are everywhere visible. Society has acquired a pluralistic character and the Church as well as theology have to try to communicate the Christian message or to explain it in the context of a society where the meaningfulness of the Christian discourse is no longer taken for granted, as it used to be in the past.

The social teaching tradition in the Church during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was working with the concept of a Christian society at a time when society was passing through a fast-moving process of dechristianization or secularization. The appeal of *Rerum Novarum* to the wealthy class to take the obligations of charity very seriously, for the rich had to give an account to God in the last judgement concerning the use they had made of their material possessions, or its appeal to the working class to feel privileged for having the opportunity of being so close to Jesus Christ through the exercise of the virtues of poverty and obedience, or finally its appeal to modern States to make provisions for the spiritual good of the soul by preventing danger to morals through the mixing of the sexes and enforcing the rest from work on Sundays and certain holy days, lose most of their effect, because they are practically uttered in a vacuum. Similarly, very little meaning, if any at all, could such a statement in *Quadragesimo Anno* convey to a secular world:

“All those versed in social matters earnestly demand a rational reorganization in order to bring back economic life to sound and true order. But this order, which We Ourselves most

11 The Christian remedy included a reform not only of institutions but also of conduct. Cf. *Rerum Novarum*, n. 13 and *Quadragesimo Anno*, n. 77.

12 The insistence on the part of the Church to speak of society as if it were still Christian, when in reality it had become already secular, created a “cultural divorce” between the Church and society. The “doctrine” which it formulated, especially on the rôle of religion and the Church in society, lacked a socio-historical base that could make it plausible. Cf. Johannes B. Metz, *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft: Studien zu einer Praktischen Fundamentaltheologie*, Mainz, 2 Aufl., 1980, pp. 17-18; Walter Kasper, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-6. On the progressive separation between Church and State and the rise of a secular society see: Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, *Staat, Gesellschaft, Freiheit: Studien zur Staatstheorie und zum Verfassungsrecht*. Frankfurt am Main, 1976, pp. 42-64.

earnestly desire and make every effort to promote, will be quite faulty and imperfect, unless all man's activities harmoniously unite to imitate and, as far as it is humanly possible, attain the marvellous unity of the divine plan".⁽¹³⁾

Hence, the concept of society, underlying the first two major social encyclicals, presuppose that society is organically structured in such a way that life in this world is necessarily related to life in the next. Indeed, one can rightly say that in this kind of society it is the supernatural order which constitutes mainly the regulative principle and sets the order of priorities.

The order of priority is clearly discernible in Leo XIII's and Pius XI's social system. It follows from the aim of society which is "to make men better"⁽¹⁴⁾ or, more specifically expressed, to place "God as the first and supreme end of all created activity", and to regard "all created goods as mere instruments under God, to be used only in so far as they help towards the attainment of our supreme end".⁽¹⁵⁾ Accordingly, the real wealth of society cannot be measured in material terms, for it is the quality of social life which ultimately counts: "The chief good that society can possess is virtue."⁽¹⁶⁾

It is logical to deduce from such premises that those who are responsible for the government and administration of society deserve the highest esteem and respect. They are or, at least, they are supposed to be, working on behalf of justice in society. They are engaged in an activity which should dispose people to be just toward each other and to promote the common good. Hence, in comparison with materially productive work, theirs is more valuable.⁽¹⁷⁾

Leo XIII was faithful to tradition, relying mostly on Thomas Aquinas,⁽¹⁸⁾ when he distinguished between the work of government or civil administration, on the one hand, and unskilled or skilled labour, on the other. Given that they are two forms of human activity with a different finality, they are not to be placed in the same order of priority. In fact, one is directly, while the other is indirectly, linked with the life of virtue in society. Nevertheless, they are both forms of human activity, deserving great respect, for in each case the subject is the human person. Besides, the section of the population, engaged in materially productive activity, is making an indispensable contribution to the common good, for without the goods that it provides, no human society can physically survive. In other words, while social life should

13 *Quadragesimo Anno*, n. 136.

14 *Rerum Novarum*, n. 27.

15 *Quadragesimo Anno*, n. 136.

16 *Rerum Novarum*, n. 27.

17 *ibid.*

18 Th. Aquinas, *De Regimini Principum*, 1:15, quoted by Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*, n. 27.

include more than the provision of material goods, such goods constitute a necessary condition for its physical survival and self-maintenance. In the context of a hierarchically ordered society, like the one presupposed by Leo XIII, participation in the life of society involves certain limits. In fact, the work of justice, on the collective level, belongs directly to that class of people who are governing or administering society.⁽¹⁹⁾ The workers have only a limited and an indirect contribution to give to the promotion of a better society: they are expected to live a virtuous life, on the individual level, and to take proper care of their families. The rights of the family receive a lot of importance, because they safeguard that space of freedom which the worker, as a head of a family, requires to manage his household and govern his family in a proper way.⁽²⁰⁾ Hence, in such a society, as Leo XIII envisaged it, everyone is expected to keep one's place, because that is a condition for the maintenance of the hierarchical character of the social order. But those, occupying a lower position, should continue to enjoy a legitimate area of freedom. The underlying principle here is that the lower should not be swallowed up by the higher.

Leo XIII's teaching on the right to private property is meaningful, only if it is seen in relation to his teaching on the individual's right to a relative degree of autonomy. Although he believed that this right, being a requirement of natural law, should hold for everyone, rich and poor alike, he emphasized that its abolition would harm the interests of the working class itself, because it would reduce the worker to a state of dependence on those who have effective control over the people's property. His thesis was that the right of private property, which belongs to everyone and, above all, to those who earn a living out of their work, is a guarantee to the individual's right to manage his own life and that of his family in freedom.⁽²¹⁾

Logically enough, the right to private property assumed a place of primary importance in Leo XIII's view of society.⁽²²⁾ This right functioned as a means for society to know what belonged to each person and group and for each person and group to enjoy a legitimate area of freedom. Without it, the social framework, designed precisely to allow the possibility of individual self-realization within the social whole, would collapse to the detriment of individual freedom.

19 *Rerum Novarum*, n. 27.

20 *ibid.*, nos. 9-11.

21 *ibid.*, nos. 3-10, 35.

22 O. von Nell-Breuning observes that the Church has continued to affirm up until recently that the right to private property constitutes a principle of order and a structural element of human society. The emphasis now lies more on work as the basis of a truly human community. Cf. his book, *Mitbestimmung — Wer mit Wem ?* Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 1969, pp. 51, 63. Cf. also above, n. 7.

In spite of the attraction that the Leonine model of society might have held to people who were eager to hear the word of the Pope, it must be said that this was a static model and, therefore, one which was due to be replaced at some time or other in the course of contemporary history.

Pius XI was clearly in favour of the organic form which society had assumed in the past but he seemed to have been aware that the circumstances required a measure of creative thinking in order to project a suitable type of society for his times. He held that society could develop an organic structure only if it was based on what he called, following a long standing tradition in the Church, the principle of subsidiarity.⁽²³⁾ This principle is conceived precisely to indicate, as far as this is possible in such matters, the relationship between the various members of society, occupying different positions and exercising varying degrees of responsibility. It is calculated to avoid the dangers of individualism and collectivism and, hence, to create a kind of society where order, balance and harmony regulate the functioning of the individual parts with respect to each other and to the whole.

The Pope did actually try to project an organic type of society, reflecting somehow the hierarchical structure of the Church. The image of the body which Saint Paul in his letter to the Ephesians used to describe the nature of the Christian community was extended by Pius XI to describe how society in general should be like.⁽²⁴⁾ This approach to the social problem gave rise to the impression that the Church had its own specific concept of society and, to a certain extent, a corresponding programme of social reform.

Philosophical and Theological Reflections

In the approach of Leo XIII and Pius XI one should make an important philosophical distinction. The organic *concept* of society, which they presuppose as an indispensable framework within which the various social questions have to be asked and answered, is to be clearly distinguished from the *principles* on which that concept of society is based. They are not to be identified for the simple reason that one is narrower than the other. A specific concept of society may be reconcilable with a particular set of basic principles but it is not the only one which can be possibly built on such principles. More precisely, one can say that the organic concept of society, assumed by the early social teaching of the Church, might have, indeed, been historically dated but the principles on which it was presumably based had and still have a lasting significance.

23 *Quadragesimo Anno*, nos. 79-80.

24 *ibid.*, n. 90.

The most fundamental among those principles is the principle of reconciliation. This principle expresses the conviction that people are not born to make war against each other but to live with each other in peace. The order of peace, of course, requires that rights should be recognized and respected, while duties should be enforced and fulfilled. A corollary of this principle is the principle concerning the dignity of the human person. The human person can never be used as a means to an end, since he is an intelligent and free being and he is created by God to share in his creative and redemptive activity. At this stage, it is important to note a principle to which Leo XIII and Pius XI keep on referring, namely, that the person in need calls for an urgent intervention from those who are in a position to do something on his behalf. The Popes applied this principle to emphasize the urgency of doing justice with the working-class which was in a miserable position at the time. There is then the principle of subsidiarity which is very useful as a criterion to distinguish between free and oppressive societies.

Besides the foregoing principles, there are also some basic values to which Leo XIII and Pius XI made a consistent appeal. The guiding value is that of justice. Without justice, social relationships would degenerate into power relations and people would become either masters or slaves of each other. Love or charity, as it is called in Christian terms, is also brought in as an indispensable value to promote in a truly human society. The call of charity presupposes but goes beyond the call of justice. Giving the other his due is the minimum that one can do from the perspective of love. Love requires an attitude of openness to the other and a readiness to share what one has with the other in need. Animated by love, social life would transform itself into a life of sharing; citizens would become friends or, as the Gospel says, brothers and sisters in Christ.

The above distinction between social systems and the principles and values on which they are based is essential for a proper understanding of the relationship between faith and social action. Social action, as we have noted, always involves some sort of social theory, that is, an implicit image of society. Since faith is always a call to explore new ways of living human life on a yet deeper level, it can never be identified with a particular historical model of society. Specific social models may, indeed, be consonant with the Christian message but they can never be identified with it, for faith will then lose its transcending character.

As regards the principles and values at the basis of particular social theories, these too cannot be simply identified with the Word of God. In fact, this Word clarifies such principles and values by placing them within a wider and deeper context, that is, the context of God's creative and redemptive love, and so it corrects them, where necessary, so that they can play a better and fuller rôle in the reconstruction of society.

Even if the work of theology to define more clearly and correctly the relationship between Christology and anthropology, Christian charity and justice, grace and freedom, may look somewhat too abstract, it is a work which has an intrinsically practical orientation, for it is, strictly speaking, dealing with the primary sources of a new form of life among men.⁽²⁵⁾

From a theological point of view, the main problem of the conciliar social teaching of the Church lies in that the relationship between faith and social action was explained with the help of the categories of nature and supernature, as these were understood in neo-scholastic theology. This tradition included within the category of "the natural order of things" not simply the basic principles and values which should animate and guide a truly human society but also a specific configuration of society which was much more earth-bound than it was generally thought, because it had a historical origin and could be revised in the light of new socio-historical experiences. The recourse to the data of revelation served the purpose of providing an additional reason for accepting the concept of society, underlying the social teaching of the Church, and a further motive to abide by its requirements.

The Conciliar Tradition: A Developmental View of History

A comprehensive study of the method in the social teaching of the Church should examine also the standpoint of Pius XII.⁽²⁶⁾ However, for our purposes here one can only say in passing that although he continued to follow the earlier approach, namely, to view the labour question and other social problems from the perspective of an organic society, he started to give a lot of attention to what we have called principles and values which should form the basis of a more human and so more Christian social order. The principle concerning the dignity of the human person featured frequently in his social writings. His interest in the matter foreshadowed the present-day interest of the Church in human rights as a necessary condition for the proper development of an economic, political and social order. But Pius XII had not yet grasped the significance of a developmental view of history for a more relevant social teaching by the Church in the world today.

25 Cf. Walter Kasper, "Christologie und Anthropologie" in *Theologische Quartalschrift Tübingen* 3 (1982), 202-221.

26 Pius XII wrote no social encyclicals, presumably because he believed that the Church had substantially said what it had to say on the social problem in *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. Cf. O. von Nell-Breuning, *Soziallehre der Kirche*, p. 69. However, of particular importance to understand his own social teaching are his Radio Messages delivered on Christmas Eve in 1941 and 1942 as well as his Radio Message delivered on Pentecost in 1941 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Rerum Novarum*.

It was Vatican II which had actually made the decisive step in that direction. One of its basic theses was that "the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one."⁽²⁷⁾

The new approach was already evident in the social encyclicals of John XXIII. Instead of reading history with the aid of a pre-formed historical model, he let history speak for itself. Rather than yielding to a sense of nostalgia for the good old times, he was confident to find something very positive in recent historical developments. History, he thought, never comes back to an earlier stage, because it is a continuously evolving reality. The Church, therefore, should not try to pull history back to an earlier phase; it should rather seek to interpret the significance of the chief developments in human consciousness, in all areas of social life and in technology. In this way, the Church would be guiding society to keep on moving forward and making true progress.

John XXIII was not so much concerned with the elaboration of a Christian view of society as with the promotion of emerging new values in contemporary society. It was his conviction that history had brought with it a new consciousness of the dignity of the human person — male and female — and had created an interdependent world. In the dignity of the human person and in the growing ties between people he saw two, extremely important, values which should stimulate the Christian community to penetrate them further in the light of revelation.⁽²⁸⁾

The social encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, is the first one to be addressed to "the men of good will" besides the hierarchy and faithful of the entire Catholic world. In a morally and religiously pluralistic world, the Church tried to enter into a dialogue with all people who are conscientiously searching for the truth about man, society, the world and God. The new audience called for a more flexible perspective, free from unnecessary historical conditionings, so that the discussion could be held on a common platform.

First, there was the need of an updated analysis of the socio-historical situation. John XXIII's method of analysis presupposes the notion of history as the *locus* of events which somehow imply a logic of their own. They are not intelligible to the extent that they can fit into a pre-established scheme. Their meaning cannot be deduced from a given set of abstract principles; it can be discovered, if such events are seen as part of an evolving reality. The new situation that emerges in every historical epoch is new in the true sense of the term. It cannot be treated as another "instance" to which the principles that have al-

27 *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 5. Unless otherwise stated, the English translation of texts quoted from this Constitution is the one given in Walter M. Abbott SJ (ed), *Documents of Vatican II*. London — Dublin 1966.

28 Cf. *Mater et Magistra*, nos. 59-67; *Pacem in Terris*, nos. 39-45.

ready been deduced from the natural and, hence, perennial order of things should be applicable. Looking at history as a developing process, John XXIII tried to capture the deeper significance of what ordinary language in his own times called *development*.

It has been noted that in the social teaching of John XXIII we see already a change in method from the deductive to the inductive one. The new method is called inductive,⁽²⁹⁾ because it assumes that God has not spoken His Word once for all in revelation and in natural law but that he is continuously active in the historical process itself. One should, therefore, be attentive to the signs of His presence in history or, to use the current terminology, the signs of the times.⁽³⁰⁾ This notion figured, rather prominently for the first time in the social teaching of the Church, in *Pacem in Terris*, where it was used to close the Pope's reflections on the developments which he noted in the field of the philosophy of the human person, as subject of rights and duties, in national and international relations and in the field of relationships in the human community on a global level. The interest of the Pope in surveying such developments was to bring out their full potential for a more truly human life.

The analysis had to be followed by the interpretation of the situation. Although the new method contained, one may say, a bias in favour of what was positive and valuable in historical developments, it did not ignore the negative and dark sides. The interpretation of the historical process was conducted chiefly on the ethical level, that is, on the basis of what is less and what is more human, always, however, in the light of the Gospel. Judging with this criterion, John XXIII found much to criticize in what usually passed as part of progress or development.

Progress or development! These are key terms already in Pius XII's social writings during the fifties⁽³¹⁾ but they gain an increasingly central

29 On the so-called "inductive method" in the recent social teaching of the Church, see especially: M-D Chenù, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-86. The author justifiably gives a lot of importance to a key text in the letter which Cardinal Maurice Roy, then President of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, wrote to Pope Paul VI on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the encyclical "Pacem in Terris". Referring to the method of John XXIII, the Cardinal said: "His method is not deductive but *inductive*; he speaks of that which he has seen and discovered..." Part One, II C. W. Kasper is suggesting the concept of "reflexive-reductive" rather than "inductive" method to express the relationship between the moral and religious level, because there is a distinction between the two levels that should not be obscured by the particular terminology which is used. Cf. "Theologische Bestimmung der Menschenrechte", pp. 291-3.

30 Concerning the notion of "signs of the times" confer: M-D Chenù's, "Le signes des temps", in *L'Eglise dans le monde de ce temps*, Tours, 1967, 97-116; Alszeghy and Flick, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-8.

31 Cfr. Pius XII and Technology, compiled by Leo J. Haigerty, Milwaukee, 1962.

position in the social encyclicals of John XXIII and in the relevant documents of Vatican II.⁽³²⁾ They are a proof that the Church has been slowly changing its perspective on the world from a static to a dynamic one. The contribution of the Church lay in that it kept on appealing to the chief criterion on which progress or development should be evaluated. This is the good of *each* person in *all* his dimensions.⁽³³⁾

Yet, the developmental view of history, which is already present in the social thought of John XXIII but which is even more marked in Vatican II, especially in *Gaudium et Spes*, conditioned somehow the interpretation and assessment of the human situation.⁽³⁴⁾ The Council observed that the human race today is passing through a "new stage of its history"⁽³⁵⁾ and is undergoing "a true social and cultural transformation".⁽³⁶⁾ Certainly, it did not see only "the joys and the hopes" but also "the griefs and the anxieties" of the people today.⁽³⁷⁾ The experience of mankind today is not merely one of "wonder at its own discoveries and its powers" but also one of "anxious questions".⁽³⁸⁾ The ambiguity, characteristic of the human condition today, is simply but forcefully expressed by the Council:

"... the modern world shows itself at once powerful and weak, capable of the noblest deeds or the foulest. Before it lies the path to freedom or to slavery, to progress or retreat, to brotherhood or hatred".⁽³⁹⁾

The source of this ambiguity or, one may even say, contradiction, inherent in the human condition, does not lie exclusively in man's finitude. In fact, more effective is the influence of sin in man and in the world.

Therefore, it is not altogether true to say that the Council painted a rosy picture of the world today. But there is some truth in saying that its developmental view of history put certain limits to what it could see and to the judgement it passed on the present situation. The conflicts, which man was experiencing within himself, with others and with

32 For a comprehensive bibliography on the declarations of the Church on development between 1961 and 1967 see: Ph. Land, *op. cit.*, pp. 321-4.

33 This criterion is already clearly formulated by John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra*, nos. 212-7.

34 The concept of "developmental" seems to be more suitable than that of "evolutionary" view of history, because as Rendtorff points out, the notion of development, involves human intervention in the way of rational planning and guiding of history. Cf. Trutz Rendtorff, "Christian Foundation of Worldly Commitment", in Ph. Land, *op. cit.*, 85-103, pp. 91-2.

35 *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 4.

36 *ibid.*

37 *ibid.*, n. 1.

38 *ibid.*, n. 3.

39 *ibid.*, n. 9.

the world, were not regarded as symptoms of a serious disease but as the pains of growth. "As happens in any *crisis of growth*", the Council said, "this transformation has brought serious difficulties in its wake."⁽⁴⁰⁾ The underlying assumption is that the difficulties may, indeed, be serious but they will hopefully be overcome in the course of history itself, after the critical stage has passed.

Certainly, the Council does not believe that the concept of history, as a continuously developing reality, reduces history to a purely mechanical process, where things happen simply because they must happen. History is the arena of human freedom. The optimism of Vatican II is actually rooted in its belief that man is becoming conscious of his responsibility to guide the course of history: "... man is becoming aware that it is his responsibility to guide aright the forces which he has unleashed and which can enslave him or minister to him".⁽⁴¹⁾ This faith in man is, of course, not enough, according to revelation, to provide man with a solid ground for hope. Christian faith points to the power of God, revealed particularly in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, as the real ground for hope in a world which is very often in contradiction with human aspirations. But the Council interprets this fundamental truth of the Christian faith from the perspective of a developmental concept of history, that is, history experienced as a process in and through which man has deepened his moral self-awareness and achieved an unprecedented level of technical power.

Philosophical and Theological Reflections

John XXIII and Vatican II were reluctant to reduce man to a one-dimensional being. They considered man to be at once a powerful and weak being. Harmony and conflict are woven into the texture of social life. In practice, however, man experiences himself differently in accordance with the perspective from which he is particularly looking at himself and the world around him. It seems that the Church in the sixties, the decade of general optimism in Europe and North America, has formulated its teaching on the social problems of the time on the assumption that there is development going on in history. The Council preferred to speak of countries "on the road to development" than "underdeveloped countries"⁽⁴²⁾ and of "the growing conviction"⁽⁴³⁾ that

40 *ibid.*, n. 4.

41 *ibid.*, n. 9.

42 *ibid.*, nos. 6, 9. One should, however, observe that the Council has been also somewhat aware that the present economic order does not permit the less developed countries to develop themselves properly, since they are kept in a state of dependence upon the rich countries. Referring to what it has earlier called "nations on the road to progress", the Council states: "Still they continually fall behind while very often their dependence on wealthier nations deepens more rapidly, even in the economic sphere". n. 9.

43 *ibid.*, n. 9.

humanity should seek to establish a political, social and economic order which would serve man and help individuals as well as groups to affirm and develop the dignity proper to them. The Conciliar viewpoint, therefore, was that there was a definite progress, going on in the world and more was yet to come as soon as the problems, associated with a general crisis of growth, would be adequately resolved.

From a philosophical point of view, the interpretation of the socio-historical situation, on the basis of a specific historical model, is a perfectly valid procedure, as long as the consequent interpretation is realized to be a relative one.⁽⁴⁴⁾ One of the major problems, related to this method of historical analysis and interpretation, arises as soon as the socio-historical situation is extended to include a variety of concrete situations which simply cannot be explained in terms of the operative scheme of interpretation. This was, justifiably enough, the main objection which the theology of liberation leveled against the Conciliar socio-historical standpoint.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Moving to the theological level, we have to make a very important preliminary observation. This is that the Council wanted to find a kind of language which can express better the relationship between faith and social action than the traditional language of "nature" and "supernature" which is tied up with a rather static view of the universe. Rather than "human nature", the Council preferred to speak of "human experience". In place of the concept of the "supernatural", the Council used the more familiar terminology, that is, "the Word of God", "revelation", "revealed truth" or simply "the Gospel". This alternative way of speaking was thought to be more in line with a developmental concept of man, society and the world.

But how does the Council conceive the relationship between faith and social action? There are two contexts in which it tries, at least indirectly, to answer this question. They are the following:

"The Church guards the heritage of God's Word and draws from it religious and moral principles, without always having at hand the solution to particular problems. She desires thereby to add the light of revealed truth to mankind's store of experience, so that the path which humanity has taken in recent times will not be a dark one".⁽⁴⁶⁾

"There are a number of particularly urgent needs characterizing the present age, needs which go to the roots of the human race. To a consideration of these in the light of the gospel and of

44 Ernst Troeltsch held basically such an approach in his philosophy of history. Cf. *Der Historismus und seine Überwindung*, Berlin, 1924.

45 Cf. Gutierrez, *op. cit.*, pp. 46, 134.

46 *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 33.

human experience, the Council would now direct the attention of all".⁽⁴⁷⁾

Defining itself as the community which has inherited the Word of God, the Church recognizes its limitations in solving the various problems of man. It acknowledges that it does not have always at hand the solution to particular problems. Pope Pius XI had already distinguished between the moral and technical side of social questions and restricted the competence of the Church to the former but he repeated the assertion, made by Leo XIII, concerning the labour question, namely, that: "no solution could be found apart from the intervention of Religion and of the Church".⁽⁴⁸⁾ Vatican II shifts the emphasis. The Church, it says, has surely a decisive contribution to make to the solution of man's problems but, when these are particular or concrete problems, the Church has not always an available solution. The contribution of the Church lies more on the level of religious and moral principles. The search for and the construction of an increasingly more human world form part of a historical process in which the whole of humanity is supposed to participate in a creative manner. The Church cannot take the rôle of mankind for itself, for it is itself part of mankind: "this community (i.e. the Church) realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history".⁽⁴⁹⁾ What the Church hopes to contribute is "the light of revealed truth to mankind's store of experience". In the light of revelation, human experience will not dissolve itself but it will be seen in a wider and deeper dimension which reveals the distortions to which it is liable and affirms the reference which it should have to a higher order of being. Yet, the concept of human experience cannot be easily pinned down, since it can assume a variety of forms. Limiting ourselves to the Conciliar interpretation, we can say that *in principle* it involves the notion of man as a powerful and weak being but *in practice* there is a slant toward either one or the other side of the human condition. These two ways of interpreting human experience are reflected in the Christian anthropology of Vatican II.

In fact, the Council took up the notion of man as a powerful and weak being and elaborated it further in the light of the Christian doctrine of creation, fall and redemption.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The guiding theological idea here is "the mystery of man" which "the mystery of the Incarnate Word" somehow illuminates. The Council concluded its reflections on this theme by saying:

"Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ

47 *ibid.*, n. 46.

48 *Quadragesimo Anno*, n. 11.

49 *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1.

50 *ibid.*, nos. 12-22.

and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by his death. He has lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the spirit: Abba, Father!"⁽⁵¹⁾

Talking of man in terms of mystery has the obvious advantage of underlining the belief, characteristic of the Christian community but not exclusively, that human life is meaningful, if it is seen and lived on a deeper level. The significance of the Christ event lies precisely in that it has provided a new starting-point from which man can begin to reason about the meaning of his life on the individual and collective plane.

Evidently, the Council assumed that the problem to which man is seeking an answer is that concerning suffering in all its forms and death which constitutes the most acute "riddle of human existence".⁽⁵²⁾ This is a great problem, if not the problem, to man who has become conscious of his increasing powers in the course of history. This man sees suffering and death as stumbling blocks in his continuous ascent to a position of greater and greater power. His attitude may swing from one extreme to the other, from dread or anxiety to rebellion. It is, however, transformed into an attitude of hope, if the answer to this tormenting riddle is sought in the Christian faith. There one can see that death itself has been conquered in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, the Christian message is translated into a message in which man, *engaged in a history of conquest*, should obviously have a great and passionate interest.

So, the theological notion of man as mystery, which is intended to elaborate further man's power and weakness, includes within it already an orientation to the other theological idea, which Vatican II used to relate the faith to man's self-experience as a being who is moving from lower to higher stages of development. This is the notion of man as a being created "in the image of God" and called to collaborate with God in the evolving work of creation. What this notion of man means from the theological standpoint of Vatican II the following text makes very clear:

"... man, created to God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all that it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to Him who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. Thus by the subjection of all things to man, the name of the Lord would be wonderful in all the earth".⁽⁵³⁾

51 *ibid.*, n. 22.

52 *ibid.*, n. 18.

53 *ibid.*, n. 34.

Of course, the subjection of which the Council is speaking here is a qualified one. It is described in terms of government in justice and holiness which assumes a relational image of man. Man is called and sent to establish the right order of relations between himself and the rest of creation as a sign of recognition of God's Lordship over everything and everyone. The Lordship of God is actually to be regarded mainly as a guarantee against the possible corruption of the sense of justice among men; it provides a constant point of reference for a deeper and more authentic notion of justice, since it puts limits to be observed by all in their inter-relationships and their relationship with the world.

However, the Council's bias in favour of what we called the developmental concept of history is evident in the interpretation and assessment of the work on behalf of justice in the world. The notion of justice in the world discloses immediately the tragic situation among men, for it points to divisions and conflicts, to oppressors and oppressed. Now the Council did note the existing divisions, conflicts and forms of oppression between people but when it spoke of its solidarity, it had the entire humanity in view. The Council wanted to furnish a proof of "its solidarity with the entire human family".⁽⁵⁴⁾ Unconsciously, it tried to escape from the conflict by moving out of the concrete historical situations where people are being oppressed by others into a history of mankind which is supposed to be moving forward. This, of course, does not mean that the Church in Vatican II was trying to shirk its responsibility for denouncing injustice and for proclaiming a new social order. It did that but it was assuming all along that the transition from an unjust to a just order of things was not so difficult to come about in view of the development that was going on in the world.

The Post-Conciliar Tradition: Responding to a New Situation

The late sixties contained already signs of a new social consciousness in the world at large. The world was awakening to a new dimension of reality which had remained marginal in its consciousness for the past twenty years or so. This was the awareness of the *limits* of growth. It was becoming increasingly unrealistic to speak simply of progress, without taking very seriously into account the limitation of natural and human resources, the ecological crisis, the dangerous consequences of modern technology for a more human life and the evergrowing difference in the standard of living between the rich and poor countries. Of course, the world is not discovering these things for the first time; it has known them for many years but now it is experiencing them as

54 *ibid.*, n. 3.

a combined source of disruptive forces.⁽⁵⁵⁾

The response has not been uniform, even on the level of the official social teaching. Here one can easily discern at least two directions.

One direction is toward the affirmation of the transcending character of faith *vis-a-vis* the various ideologies and utopias of the time. This trend of thought was already obvious in Vatican II but it assumed a new significance in the context of the newly emerging theologies of revolution and liberation.⁽⁵⁶⁾ These attempts in recent theology were apparently regarded as somehow dangerous, since they tended to identify the faith with a particular ideology.

The transcendence of the Christian faith, as it is interpreted by the Church today, does not imply a radical break with man and his activity in the world. The Christian message continues to hold decisive socio-political implications, even if it cannot be reduced to a particular ideology and a concrete socio-political programme. Relying on this basic principle, the Church keeps calling attention to the dignity of the human person and the priority of political action, inspired by an ever deeper interest in a more human world, over political action, motivated by a particular ideology. Surely, the latter is not bad or superfluous but it is positive and useful to the extent that it is subordinated to a higher criterion (the dignity of the human person) and a higher type of political activity, that is, one which is truly open to the real needs of each man and the whole of man.

Such an approach is very significant, as we have seen in connection with the principles and values which were considered by the early social encyclicals to be essential for the creation and continuous revision of social systems. The Church now seems to be concentrating on the principle and value that should actually be at the origin of other principles and values. This is the dignity of the human person. Pope John Paul II keeps on coming back to this basic idea in order to show the limited and sometimes distorted character of current concepts of man and human freedom as well as the inadequacy of the dominating economic and socio-political ideologies.⁽⁵⁷⁾

55 Cf. Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, "Ethische und Politische Grundsatzfragen zur Zeit: Überlegungen aus Anlaß von 90 Jahre 'Rerum Novarum' ", in *Herder Korrespondenz*, 7(1981), 342-8, pp. 342-3.

56 Cf. *Octogesima Adveniens*, nos. 26-37; also the booklet issued by the Pontifical Commission "Justitia et Pax" and presented by Roger Heckel SJ in the series *The Social Teaching of John Paul II: The Theme of Liberation*, Rome, 1980.

57 Cf. the booklets published by the Pontifical Commission "Justitia et Pax" in the series *The Social Teaching of John Paul II: The Human Person and Social Structures*, presented by Roger Heckel SJ, Rome, 1980; *The Person, The Nation and The State*, presented by William Murphy, Rome, 1980; *Human Rights*, presented by Giorgio Filibeck, Rome, 1981. See also the working paper published by the same Commission under the title, *The Church and Human Rights*, Rome, 1975.

One is certainly justified to ask whether the present anti-ideological stance of the Church is not itself an expression of "the ideology" of the times. At present, there is a retreat from ideology, whether this is the ideology concerning the "ideal" structure of society or the "natural" course of history. If one speaks of "system" with respect to society and history, this should be regarded, it is argued, as "an open system".⁽⁵⁸⁾ The most that one can do in the situation is to maintain a critical attitude toward the existing modes of thinking and behaving in present-day society. Criticism, however, can serve a useful purpose, only if it is based on a valid criterion of criticism. What should the criterion be in a secular and pluralistic world? This is a highly disputed problem in philosophical circles today, especially those with a critical slant.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The answer of the Church is that the criterion for valid criticism lies in the dignity of the human person seen in the light of the mystery of Christ. This criterion establishes a point of contact with all men of good will, irrespective of their particular moral and religious convictions, without losing sight of the specificity of the Christian faith.

The other direction has a rather historical orientation. Its point of departure is the way in which man is actually experiencing himself today. During the decade after Vatican II, the pendulum has moved from the positive to the negative side, from a sense of optimism and self-fulfilment to a sense of pessimism and frustration.

Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* gave the first signs that the evolutionary perspective was not enough to explain the phenomenon of poverty and underdevelopment. The poor countries were not simply to be regarded as being on the road to progress — a road which could be facilitated with more generous and genuine help coming from the side of the rich countries. Such an aid would be helpful only in the context of a new international order which is based on the principles of world-wide collaboration and equality of opportunity. One could, therefore, no longer speak of a developing world, if one was actually talking about a world in which the powerful were keeping the weak countries in a permanent state of dependence.⁽⁶⁰⁾

John Paul II was also conscious that the categories which Vatican II employed to interpret the general human situation were no longer applicable in the late seventies. In fact, he noted that fear and anxiety rather than wonder characterize the experience of man in the face of the works of his hands. Man is not feeling merely alienated from his

58 The critique of ideology has been coming mostly from the Frankfurt School of Sociology. For relevant texts from representative authors see: Kurt Lenk, (ed.), *Ideologie; Ideologiekritik und Wissenssoziologie*, Niewied, Berlin, 1967.

59 Cf. Niklas Luhmann and Stephan H. Pfürtnner, *Theorietechnik und Moral*, Frankfurt am Main, 1978, pp. 176-254.

60 Cf. *Populorum Progressio*, nos. 51-8.

product but threatened of being destroyed by it. While the Council Fathers addressed themselves to man, conscious of his powers and self-reliant, John Paul II, at the beginning of his pontificate, sought to initiate a dialogue with man who had lost faith in himself and doubted as to whether he could recover his human dignity once more and on what basis he could do so.⁽⁶¹⁾

The foregoing two directions in post-conciliar social teaching reflect those which have been discerned in Vatican II. The Conciliar notion of man as a mystery to be seen in the mystery of Jesus Christ is taken over and elaborated by John Paul II in *Redemptor Hominis*. But this is done from a new perspective, that is, from the perspective of man's present self-experience. Since man today seems to be struck more with fear rather than with wonder in the face of his scientific and technological achievements, he should be led, the Pope maintains, to discover the surprising power of God in Jesus Christ to give him a new life. Besides, since man seems to be no longer interested in religion, including the Christian faith, to confirm and bolster his belief in a world, evolving from lower to higher stages of development, he should be invited, the Pope thinks, to recover his true dignity, as a human person, and to value it so much as to make it the criterion for continuous criticism and revision of the various theories of man and society which emerge in the course of history and the consequent behavioural patterns that they generate.

The other Conciliar notion of man as a being created to the image of God, features also in post-conciliar social teaching. Indeed, this is a basic notion in *Laborem Exercens*. As we have seen, the theology behind this notion is explained both by Vatican II and later teaching of the Church in the light of man's historical self-experience. In the case of Vatican II, man reveals his true constitution as a being, created to the image of God, the more he gains control over nature and establishes an order of justice in the world. After the Council, the same image is used but with a view of reminding man of a dignity which is always in danger of being submerged or lost.

Conclusion

One notes a certain parallelism between the method which the Church has evolved for its social teaching up to Vatican II and that which is now trying to evolve. By the time of the Council, the Church grew out of the earlier belief that the various social problems could be solved on the basis of an *a priori* concept of society which, as we have seen, was of an organic type. This new awareness was, partly at least, the result of the Church's acceptance of a developmental view of

61 Cf. *Redemptor Hominis* and *Dives in Misericordia*.

history. Viewing history in terms of a developing process, the Church seems to have over-rated the possibility of creating an increasingly more human world. It did not go deep enough into the real sources of divisions and conflicts among men. Yet, the Church, after Vatican II, kept on refusing to interpret the Christian message from a conflictual view of history. The reason does not seem to be that such a view is associated with atheistic thinkers like Karl Marx; it seems to be rather that such an approach is likely to keep the Church's interpretation of the faith tied to a particular historical view. As the conciliar Church avoided to look at social problems in the light of a pre-established concept of society, so is the post-conciliar Church careful not to let an *a priori* concept of history prejudice its analysis and interpretation of the various problems which confront man from time to time.

The method which the Church after the Council appears to be pursuing in its social teaching is one which binds it less to particular views of society and history and brings it closer to those principles and values which constitute the perennial source of creative work on behalf of a society which is really worthy of human dignity. But the Church can fulfil such a work properly, if it remains open to the changing experience through which man passes in the course of history.

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