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The Pope's Vision of a New Society: An Investigation of the Social Teaching of John Paul II

Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ

Abstract: During the last hundred years several popes have been keenly interested in the problems of human society and have articulated their views as to how these problems could be solved.¹ Their main concern has been the promotion of justice and the establishment of peace in the world. Different popes have formulated their teaching in response to the situation that prevailed at their time. John Paul II has worked for a radically new and humanised society.

Keywords: John Paul II, Kingdom of God, New Society, Church's social teaching

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The Pope's Vision of a New Society

An Investigation of the Social Teaching of John Paul II

Kurien Kunumpuram SJ

Dept. of Systematic Theology, JDV, Pune

1. Introduction

During the last hundred years several popes have been keenly interested in the problems of human society and have articulated their views as to how these problems could be solved.¹ Their main concern has been the promotion of justice and the establishment of peace in the world. Different popes have formulated their teaching in response to the situation that prevailed at their time. As John Paul II has observed:

However, if one studies the development of the question of social justice, one cannot fail to note that, whereas during the period between "*Rerum Novarum*" and Pius XI's "*Quadragesimo Anno*" the Church's teaching concentrates mainly on the just solution of the "labor question" within individual nations, in the next period the Church's teaching widens its horizon to take in the whole world. The disproportionate distribution of wealth and poverty and the existence of some countries and continents that are developed and of others that are not, call for a levelling out and for a search for ways to ensure just development for all. This is the direction of the teaching in John XXIII's encyclical "*Mater et Magistra*," in the pastoral constitution "*Gaudium et Spes*" of the Second Vatican Council and in Paul VI's encyclical "*Populorum Progressio*".²

Through the efforts of these popes there has developed in course of time what has come to be called the "social teaching" or the "social doctrine" of the Church. It is significant that the popes regarded this "social teaching" as part of the Church's mission. In the words of John Paul II:

In effect, to teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message, since this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society and situates daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ the Saviour.³

The social teaching of the Church is rooted in Scripture and Christian tradition. It is in fact "an application of the word of God to people's lives and the life of the society, as well as to the earthly realities connected with them."⁴

John Paul II believes that his teaching is "in organic connection with the whole of this tradition."⁵ His intention is to 're-read', to reinterpret the social teaching of his predecessors in the context of the emerging situation in the world today, and thereby "to contribute to the development of Christian social doctrine."⁶ Precisely because John Paul II stands in the Christian tradition

and articulates his views as the official spokesperson of the Catholic Church, I think it worthwhile to investigate his social teaching.

However, it is not my intention to study the totality of the pope's social teaching which is mainly found in three encyclicals – On Labour (*Laborem Exercens*), On Social Concern (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*) and On The Hundredth Year (*Centesimus Annus*). I shall limit myself to an examination of the pope's vision of a new society.

John Paul II did not, of course, set out to develop a vision of the new society. In fact, he makes it quite clear that “the Church does not propose economic and political systems and programmes.”⁷ He believes that the Church does not and cannot advocate a particular model of society, since an effective model can be developed only by those who are actively involved in concrete historical situations. As he declares:

The Church has no models to present; models that are real and truly effective can only arise within the framework of different historical situations, through the efforts of all those who responsibly confront concrete problems in all their social, economic, political and cultural aspects, as these interact with one another.⁸

All the same, I believe that implicit in the pope's social teaching is the vision of a new society. This does not mean that he has sketched the blueprint of the society to come. Rather, he has spelt out the values that are to be realized in the new society and has indicated the principles for the organization of the new society. And in this paper I intend to highlight these values and principles. However,

these values and principles are enunciated in the context of the pope's analysis of the contemporary situation as well as his critique of capitalism and socialism. Hence, we need to discuss them in order to understand the pope's vision of a new society.

This paper begins with a discussion of the pope's understanding of the situation of the modern world. It goes on to examine his critique of capitalism and socialism. It then deals with the values and principles of the new society that he advocates. And it concludes by proposing some practical steps.

2. Understanding of the Situation

2.1 As John Paul II looks at the contemporary world what strikes him first is the abysmal poverty of the masses.⁹ He sees an innumerable multitude of people “suffering under the intolerable burden of poverty.”¹⁰ He is touched by “this vast panorama of pain and suffering.” He realizes that poverty leads to hunger, malnutrition, disease and illiteracy. The poor are not only economically deprived, but they are also politically powerless, socially discriminated against, and culturally disadvantaged.¹¹ Poverty is really dehumanizing, since it involves the denial or the limitation of human rights.¹² The pope unhesitatingly describes this as an unjust situation:

One of the greatest injustices in the contemporary world consists precisely in this: that the ones who possess much are relatively few and those who possess almost nothing are many. It is the injustice of the poor distribution of the goods and services originally intended for all.¹³

Closely connected with poverty is growing unemployment in the world today. This is quite alarming in the countries of the Third World “with their high rate of population growth and their large numbers of young people.” Even in the so-called developed countries employment opportunities are decreasing.¹⁴ As John Paul II points out:

As we view the whole human family throughout the world, we cannot fail to be struck by a disconcerting fact of immense proportion: the fact that while conspicuous natural resources remain unused there are huge numbers of people who are unemployed or underemployed and countless multitudes of people are suffering from hunger. This is a fact that, without any doubt, demonstrates that both within the individual political communities and in their relationships on the continental and world levels there is something wrong with the organization of work and employment, precisely at the most critical and socially most important points.¹⁵

Unemployment is more than an economic problem, since it brings with it “a series of negative consequences for individuals and for society, ranging from humiliation to the loss of that self-respect which every man and woman should have.”¹⁶

On the global level, a matter of great concern is “the persistence and often the widening of the gap between the areas of the so-called developed North and the developing South.”¹⁷ In the Third World, “vast multitudes are still living in conditions of great material and moral poverty.”¹⁸ We are thus faced with a shocking situation in the world today. As the pope observes:

Unfortunately, from the economic point of view, the developing countries are much more numerous than the developed ones; the multitudes of human beings who lack the goods and services offered by development are *much more numerous* than those who possess them. We are therefore faced with a serious problem of *unequal distribution* of the means of subsistence originally meant for everybody, and thus also an unequal distribution of the benefits deriving from them. And this happens not through the *fault* of the needy people, and even less through a sort of *inevitability* dependent on natural conditions or circumstances as a whole.¹⁹

John Paul II also calls our attention to the large-scale pollution of the environment and the ecological question it gives rise to.²⁰ The excessive and disordered use of the resources of the earth to satisfy a profit-oriented, consumerist culture has led to the senseless destruction of the natural environment. The nonrenewable resources of nature are being used up with no thought for the future. Ecological degradation has far-reaching consequences for the quality of life on this planet.

This is the way the pope describes the situation of the contemporary world. But how does he analyze the situation? What in his opinion are the underlying causes of this situation?

2.2 According to *Laborem Exercens*, the central conflict which causes poverty, oppression, alienation and dehumanization in our time is the conflict between capital and labour. John Paul II believes that in the industrial age, which is not yet completed, there is a conflict between “the small

but highly influential group of entrepreneurs, owners and holders of the means of production, and the broader multitude of people who lack these means and who share in the process of production solely by their labour.”²¹ This is true of all societies be they in the West, the East or the Third World. How did the conflict between capital and labour originate? This is the answer the pope gives:

The conflict originated in the fact that the workers put their powers at the disposal of the entrepreneurs and these, following the principle of maximum profit, tried to establish the lowest possible wages for the work done by the employees. In addition there were other elements of exploitation connected with the lack of safety at work and of safeguards regarding the health and living conditions of the workers and their families.²²

In order to understand the pope’s analysis we need to examine how he views capital and labour. For him work defines a human being. As he points out:

Only man is capable of work, and only man works, at the same time by work occupying his existence on earth. Thus, work bears a particular mark of man and of humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. This mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature.²³

For John Paul II work means “any human activity whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances.” The pope’s understanding of work is different from that of Karl Marx. In his commentary on *Laborem Exercens*, Gregory Baum observes:

In the first place, the encyclical clearly indicates that labour does not refer principally to industrial labour as it tends to do in Marxist literature, but includes agricultural, clerical, scientific, service-oriented and intellectual work (nn. 1, 4). Work includes home-making in the family, services offered to society on all levels, as well as the governmental and managerial skills involved in the organization of production and the moderation of society.²⁴

The pope makes a distinction between work in the objective sense and work in the subjective sense.²⁵ The objective side of work refers to the product of labour, to what is achieved out there. It denotes the goods produced by labour, but “it also includes the means of production and the technology operative within it, as well as the entire societal structure with the many-layered services that keep production and society going.”²⁶

The subjective side of work is that it is the human person who works. A person expresses him/herself through work and so actualizes him/herself. Work is thus the expression, the extension, of the person. As Baum remarks:

Because through work people constitute themselves as subjects of their own lives and collectively of their common history, the subjective side of work holds primacy over the objective side. What happens to the subject of work is more important than what this work produces.²⁷

The preeminence of the subjective meaning of work over the objective one is a key idea of *Laborem Exercens*.

What is capital? Capital refers to the means of production, to the avail-

able raw materials, and the funds necessary to pay the workers and to expand technology. That is a superficial way of looking at capital. But if we examine it more deeply, we see that capital is “the result of the heritage of human labour.” It is actually stored up labour. “However complex, gigantic and automated the means of production may be, it is labour and labour upon labour.” Capital is labour that has become an instrument.²⁸

It is such an understanding of labour and capital that leads the pope to assert the priority of labour over capital. It is the labouring people who are the subjects of production. Capital being a mere collection of things can never be the subject. It is only an instrument and has to serve labour.

All the evils of today can be traced back to the denial of the priority of labour over capital. Poverty and misery are

... a result of the violation of the dignity of human work: either because the opportunities for human work are limited as a result of the scourge of unemployment or because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.²⁹

This is in fact a denial of the subjectivity of the labouring person and the labouring society.

Stan Lourdusamy has remarked that in *Laborem Exercens* the pope has failed to undertake a scientific analysis of society.³⁰ This, he feels, is a serious deficiency. I think that Lourdusamy is right in pointing out that the encyclical

does not provide us with a scientific analysis of society. In fact, John Paul II does not believe that the Church has the competence to analyze society scientifically.³¹ All the same, I wonder if Lourdusamy appreciates sufficiently the originality of the pope’s personalistic approach to labour, capital and the relationship between the two.

2.3 According to *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the primary cause of poverty and underdevelopment in the world today is the existence of two opposing blocs, commonly known as the East and the West. As John Paul II observes:

The opposition is first of all *political*, inasmuch as each bloc identifies itself with a system of organizing society and exercising power which presents itself as an alternative to the other. The political opposition, in turn, takes its origin from a deeper opposition which is *ideological* in nature.³²

Whereas the Western system is inspired by the principles of liberal capitalism, the Eastern system is based on Marxist collectivism. Each of these ideologies has a different vision of the human person and human society and proposes and “promotes on the economic level antithetical forms of the organization of labour and the structures of ownership, especially with regard to the so-called means of production.”³³ Because of the development of antagonistic systems and centres of power with different forms of propaganda, the ideological conflict has given rise to “two blocs of armed forces, each fearful and suspicious of the other’s domination.”³⁴

What is worse is that this conflict has taken on a global character and has

affected the developing countries of the Third World. In the words of the pope:

This opposition is transferred to the developing countries themselves, and thus helps to widen the gap already existing on the economic level between *North and South* and which results from the distance between the two *worlds*: the more developed one and the less developed one.³⁵

This is the main cause of poverty and underdevelopment in the world. John Paul II also mentions two others. The first one is the immoral economic decisions of individuals which give rise to “structures of sin”.³⁶ These structures are “the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins.”³⁷ They are “linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove.” These structures of sin which are at the root of poverty and injustice in the world are created by such human attitudes as “the all-consuming desire for profit” and “the thirst for power”.³⁸

The second one is cultural diversity. The differences of culture and value systems between various population groups seem to have retarded economic development and thus caused poverty and impoverishment in the world, especially in the countries of the Third World.³⁹

John Paul II has been criticised for the way he understands the causes of poverty and misery in the world. Though the pope sets out to apply pope Paul’s teaching in *Populorum Progressio* in “a fuller and more nuanced way”, he appears to have failed

in doing so. Mary E. Hobgood points out:

This “traditionalist” pope has taken a noticeable departure from traditional or mainstream Catholic social teaching by ignoring structural criticisms concerning the causes of poverty, and by disregarding radical prescriptions of what might be done about poverty. Such structural criticisms and radical prescriptions, which may be aligned with a liberation social theory, are present not only in Paul’s encyclical, but can be found consistently within the Catholic social justice tradition itself.⁴⁰

This seems to be a valid criticism. It is true that the pope acknowledges the existence of “economic, financial and social mechanisms” that “function almost automatically” on behalf of the richer countries. However, these mechanisms are not thought to be inherent in the economic system itself, but are manipulated by individuals and “favour the interests of people manipulating them.”⁴¹ John Paul II’s personalism probably prevents him from identifying the structural causes of poverty.

2.4 *Centesimus Annus* does not discuss in depth the causes of poverty and misery in the world. This is understandable, since the encyclical was written soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist regimes of East Europe. It deals extensively with the reasons for the failure of socialism and the new situation of need that has emerged in these countries. It also attempts to answer the question: can it perhaps be said that, after the failure of communism, capitalism should be the goal of these countries which are now

making efforts to rebuild their economy and society? Should capitalism be proposed as the only option available for the countries of the Third World?⁴²

The pope does, however, deal with some of the causes of poverty and hunger in the developing countries of the Third World. He points out that the overall effect of the various policies of aid for development has not been positive.⁴³ He refers to the “unsolved problem of the foreign debt of poorer countries.”⁴⁴ This is becoming an unbearable burden since it leads to poverty and hunger for entire peoples. The countries of the Third World find it difficult to gain *a fair access* to the international market, and this has impeded their development.⁴⁵ The investment policies of rich countries and multinational corporations are harmful to the developing countries. Finally, the pope speaks of neocolonialism which continues to exploit the developing countries even after they regained their independence. In his own words:

Decisive sectors of the economy still remain *de facto* in the hands of large foreign companies which are unwilling to commit themselves to the long-term development of the host country. Political life itself is controlled by foreign powers . . .⁴⁶

John Paul II also discusses alienation of various kinds that still exists in the so-called developed countries of the West as well the inhuman exploitation that is prevalent in the countries of the Third World.⁴⁷

3 Critique of Capitalism

3.1 According to the pope, the basic error of capitalism is the denial

of the priority of labour. This error originated in the *practice* of the early capitalists. As the pope explains:

. . . it originated in the whole of the economic and social practice of that time, the time of the birth and rapid development of industrialization, in which what was mainly seen was the possibility of vastly increasing material wealth, means, while the end, that is to say man, who should be served by the means, was ignored. It was this practical error that struck a blow first and foremost against human labour, against the working man . . .⁴⁸

From this practice there arose the *theory* of capitalism which is both “economistic” and materialistic.⁴⁹ The error of economism consists in “considering human labour solely according to its economic purpose”, as an instrument of production, as a commodity which can be bought with no regard for the person of the worker. This is practical materialism. As John Paul II points out:

This fundamental error of thought can and must be called an error of materialism, in that economism directly or indirectly includes a conviction of the primacy and superiority of the material, and directly or indirectly places the spiritual and the personal (man’s activity, moral values and such matters) in a position of subordination to material reality.⁵⁰

The pope also criticizes the capitalistic understanding of the right to private property and the free market. Like his predecessors, John Paul II defends the right to private ownership of the means of production. But he rejects the position of capitalism “that defends the exclusive right to private ownership of

the means of production as an untouchable 'dogma' of economic life."⁵¹ Hence, this position of capitalism must "be reformed from the point of view of human rights, both human rights in the widest sense and those linked with man's work."⁵²

John Paul II repeatedly maintains that the wealth of the world is meant for all human beings: "God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone. *This is the foundation of the universal destination of the earth's goods.*"⁵³

From this point of view, ownership of the means of production can become illegitimate if it does not fulfil its primary function. That is why the pope declares:

It becomes illegitimate, however, when it is not utilized or when it serves to impede the work of others, in an effort to gain profit which is not the result of the overall expansion of work and the wealth of society, but rather is the result of curbing them or of illicit exploitation, speculation or the breaking of solidarity among working people. Ownership of this kind has no justification, and represents an abuse in the sight of God and man.⁵⁴

The pope's critique of the free market is quite nuanced. He believes that the free market is an "efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs."⁵⁵ And he is aware that countries which isolated themselves from the world market and tried to develop themselves have in fact "suffered stagnation and recession."⁵⁶ But if the free market is to be benefi-

cial to all the members of the society, and not merely to the rich and the powerful, then it needs to be circumscribed by "a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality."⁵⁷ Hence, the pope "demands that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and the State so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole society are satisfied." The State has the duty to safeguard the legitimate interests of the workers and to ensure that economic development benefits also the poor and other weaker sections of society.

In this context, the pope points out that "there are many human needs which find no place in the market." A human person is not just an economic unit. That is why John Paul II states:

Even prior to the logic of a fair exchange of goods and the forms of justice appropriate to it, there exists *something which is due to man because he is man*, by reason of his lofty dignity. Inseparable from that required "something" is the possibility to survive and, at the same time, to make an active contribution to the common good of humanity.⁵⁸

Finally, it must be pointed that John Paul II does not adopt the same attitude to all forms of capitalism. While he severely criticises the "unbridled capitalism" of the 18th and early 19th centuries, he is rather sympathetic to the "welfare capitalism" of the late 19th and the 20th centuries.⁵⁹ He calls for a further reform of the latter. However, he is quite wary of the "global capitalism" of our time. He is afraid that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist regimes of East Europe may

give rise to a radical capitalistic ideology “which refuses to deal with the grave human problems of poverty, marginalization and exploitation in the world, especially in the Third World.”⁶⁰ The absence of effective international agencies to control and direct the economy to the common good of all and to prevent the further impoverishment of weaker nations will prove to be disastrous for the future of humanity.⁶¹ In fact, John Paul II believes that hidden behind the decisions of the advocates of modern capitalism and imperialism are “real forms of idolatry: of money, ideology, class, technology.”⁶²

4. Critique of Socialism

What the pope criticises is not socialism in general, but the so-called “Real Socialism” which was adopted by the Soviet Union and the countries of East Europe.⁶³ It is their theory and practice that he vehemently objects to.

4.1 According to John Paul II, the fundamental error of socialism is anthropological in nature. It has a wrong understanding of the human person. As he points out:

Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism, so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism. Socialism likewise maintains that the good of the individual can be realized without reference to his free choice, to the unique and exclusive responsibility, which he exercises in the face of good or evil. Man is thus reduced to a series of social relationships, and the concept of the person

as the autonomous subject of moral decision disappears, the very subject whose decisions build the social order.⁶⁴

If the freedom and dignity of the human person are not respected, there is no possibility of building an authentic human community.

4.2 The denial of the dignity of the person is ultimately caused by atheism. “The denial of God deprives the person of his foundation, and consequently leads to a reorganization of the social order without reference to the person’s dignity and responsibility.”⁶⁵ A human person can realize the fullness of his/her humanity only by relating to God. It is only in such a relationship that he/she can become truly aware of his/her transcendent dignity. That is why “it is not possible to understand the human person on the basis of economics alone.” By attempting to do this, socialism creates a spiritual void in people and deprives them of a sense of direction “in their irrepressible search for personal dignity and the meaning of life.”⁶⁶ It ignores “the deep desire in every human heart for goodness, truth and life”, a desire that can find fulfillment only in God.⁶⁷

4.3 The pope also believes that the choice of class struggle as the means to usher in socialism is rooted in atheism.⁶⁸ Class struggle, in the Marxist sense, is founded on atheism and contempt for the human person. That is why it places “the principle of force above that of reason and law.”⁶⁹ The pope’s critique of class struggle is quite nuanced. He does not condemn every form of social conflict. As he says:

The Church is well aware that in the course of history conflicts of interest between different social groups inevitably arise, and that in the face of such conflicts Christians must often take a position, honestly and decisively. The Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* moreover clearly recognized the positive role of conflict when it takes the form of a "struggle for social justice" *Quadragesimo Anno* had already stated that "if the class struggle abstains from enmities and mutual hatred, it gradually changes into an honest discussion of differences founded on a desire for justice."⁷⁰

What the pope condemns in class struggle is "the idea that conflict is not restrained by ethical or juridical considerations, or by respect for the dignity of others."⁷¹ In the pursuit of partisan interests, class struggle seeks to destroy whatever stands in its way. It transfers to the sphere of internal conflict between social groups the doctrine of "total war", which militarism applies to international relations. And this makes it impossible to search for a proper balance between the interests of various groups in society.⁷²

4.4 The pope is against State ownership of the means of production, advocated by socialism. This leads to "excessive bureaucratic centralization, which makes the worker feel that he is just a cog in a huge machine moved from above, that he is for more reasons than one a mere production instrument rather than a true subject of work with an initiative of his own."⁷³ This is a violation of the principle of the priority of labour over capital, which John Paul II defends as a postulate of social morality. Any system that does not respect

the subjectivity of the worker and the labouring society is not acceptable to him, because it deprives the workers of all responsibility and creativity in the process of production. It is significant that in the pope's opinion one of the causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist regimes of East Europe was "the inefficiency of the economic system, which is not to be considered simply as a technical problem, but rather as a consequence of the violation of human rights to private initiative, to ownership of property and to freedom in the economic sector."⁷⁴

5. Towards a New Society: Values

5.1 Central to the pope's vision of a new society is the dignity of the human person. Created in the image of God and called to communion with him, the human person has a transcendent dignity. This is the basis of human rights. John Paul II has consistently championed these rights. Whatever be the concrete shape of society, it has to safeguard these rights. The pope lists the more basic rights:

Among the most important of these rights, mention must be made of the right to life, an integral part of which is the right of the child to develop in the mother's womb from the moment of conception; the right to live in a united family and in a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child's personality; the right to develop one's intelligence and freedom in seeking and knowing the truth; the right to share in the work which makes wise use of the earth's material resources, and to derive from that work the means to support oneself and one's dependents; and the right freely

to establish a family, to have and to rear children through the responsible exercise of one's sexuality. In a certain sense, the source and synthesis of these rights is religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in conformity with one's transcendent dignity as a person.⁷⁵

5.2 The pope resonates with the contemporary quest for freedom and liberation. He believes that the aspiration to freedom from all forms of slavery affecting the individual and society is something noble and legitimate.⁷⁶ But human freedom is to be understood comprehensively. Economic freedom is only one element of human freedom. Its other dimensions – the sociocultural, the religious, the transcendent – are also to be fostered. "Human beings are totally free only when they are completely *themselves* in the fullness of their rights and duties."⁷⁷ This has implications for the organization of society. As the pope affirms:

Where society is so organized as to reduce arbitrarily or even suppress the sphere in which freedom is legitimately exercised, the result is that the life of society becomes progressively disorganized and goes into decline.⁷⁸

5.3 The pope is in favour of "the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of the citizens in making political decisions."⁷⁹ He is against "narrow ruling groups which usurp the power of the State for individual interests or for ideological ends."⁸⁰ He is aware that authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct perception of the human person. De-

mocracy without a commitment to ethical values can easily turn into totalitarianism. Hence, John Paul II points out:

It requires that the necessary conditions be present for the advancement both of the individual through education and formation in true ideals, and of the "subjectivity" of society through the creation of structures of participation and shared responsibility.⁸¹

It is important to note that the pope advocates participation and shared responsibility in all aspects of civic life, especially in economic activity. Democracy in the workplace is one of his great concerns.

Besides, the health of the political community is necessary for the growth of human persons. In the words of the pope:

For the "health" of a political community – as expressed in the free and responsible participation of all citizens in public affairs, in the rule of law and in respect for and promotion of human rights – is the *necessary condition and sure guarantee* of the development of "the whole individual and of all people."⁸²

5.4 John Paul II stands for a society which facilitates the full flowering of the human on this planet. That is why he rejects the consumer society which is concerned only with the satisfaction of material human needs. By denying any value to morality, law, culture and religion, it reduces the human person to the sphere of economics and the satisfaction of material needs. The pope stresses the importance of "being" rather than "having". As he points out:

To “have” objects and goods does not in itself perfect the human subject, unless it contributes to the maturing and enrichment of that subject’s “being”, that is to say unless it contributes to the realization of the human vocation as such.⁸³

The pope pleads for the creation of lifestyles “in which the quest for truth, beauty goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth” is fostered.⁸⁴ He also advocates the adoption of eco-friendly attitudes. He stands for ecological solidarity. Humans have to learn to respect all created things – animals, plants and the natural elements.⁸⁵ John Paul II is happy to note that the awareness is growing among people today “of the need to respect the integrity and cycles of nature and to take them into account when planning for development.”⁸⁶

6. Towards a New Society: Principles

In his social encyclicals, John Paul II has enunciated the principles for the organization of the new society. We shall briefly discuss them here.

6.1 Principle of Solidarity

Solidarity is the correct moral response to the experience of interdependence.⁸⁷ Today we live in a world where interdependence is a reality. We live within a system that determines how we relate to each other in the economic, political, cultural and religious spheres. As a result, there is growing awareness of a radical interdependence, a realization that people all over the world are “linked together by a common destiny.”⁸⁸ And this awareness is convincing people “of the need for a solidarity

which will take up interdependence and transfer it to a moral plane.”⁸⁹

The pope makes it clear that solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people today. As he says:

On the contrary, it is a *firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible *for all*. This determination is based on the *solid* conviction that what is hindering full development is that desire for profit and that thirst for power already mentioned. These attitudes and “structures of sin” are only conquered – presupposing the help of divine grace – by a *diametrically opposed attitude*: a commitment to the good of one’s neighbour with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to “lose oneself” for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to “serve him” instead of oppressing him for one’s own advantage (cf. Mt. 10: 40-42; 20:25; Mk. 10:42-45; Lk. 22: 25-27).⁹⁰

First of all, the principle of solidarity applies to relationship within each country. As the pope points out:

Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel *responsible* for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of *solidarity*, should not adopt a purely *passive* attitude or one that is *destructive* of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all. The

intermediate groups, in their turn, should not selfishly insist on their particular interests, but respect the interests of others.⁹¹

Donal Dorr finds this recommendation of the pope somewhat bland. In his opinion, "it could have benefited from a social analysis that would take more seriously the causes of the class structure of society."⁹² There is also need to examine how tensions between the classes can be lessened. In any case, there is no justification for the existence of pockets of affluence in the midst of widespread poverty and misery.

The principle of solidarity has implications for the international community. There is no place for domination, oppression and exploitation in the relations between nations. As John Paul declares:

Surmounting every type of *imperialism* and determination to preserve their own *hegemony*, the stronger and richer nations must have a sense of moral *responsibility* for the other nations, so that a real *international system* may be established which will rest on the foundation of the *equality* of all peoples and on the necessary respect for their legitimate difference. The economically weaker countries, or those still at subsistence level, must be enabled, with the assistance of other peoples and of the international community, to make a contribution of their own to the common good with their treasures of *humanity* and *culture*, which otherwise would be lost for ever.⁹³

Besides, the existence of different worlds within our *one world* – the First World, the Second World, the Third

World and the Fourth World – is a negation of the unity of the world, the unity of the human race. This goes against the spirit of solidarity.⁹⁴

6.2 Principle of Subsidiarity

Basing himself on Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*, John Paul II states:

A community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.⁹⁵

The principle of subsidiarity is basically a principle of decentralisation. It is meant to safeguard the freedom and autonomy of individuals, families and various groups and associations which make up society. The pope is concerned about making space for the initiative and creativity of individuals and smaller units of society within their sphere of activity. This is in keeping with his understanding of the subjectivity of labour and the labouring society.

The principle of subsidiarity helps to define and delimit the role of the State. As the pope points out:

According to *Rerum Novarum* and the whole social doctrine of the Church, the social nature of man is not completely fulfilled in the State, but is realized in various intermediary groups, beginning with the family and including economic, social, political and cultural groups which stem from human nature itself and have their own autonomy, always with a view to the common good.⁹⁶

Applying this general principle to economic life, John Paul II asserts that the State “has the task of determining the juridical framework within which economic affairs are to be conducted, and thus of safeguarding the prerequisites of a free economy.”⁹⁷ This means that the State has to make room for the free exercise of economic activity. As the pope puts it:

Rather, the State has a duty to sustain business activities by creating conditions which will ensure job opportunities, by stimulating those activities where they are lacking or by supporting them in moments of crisis.⁹⁸

Besides, it is the responsibility of the State to defend the weaker sections of society, to ensure a just wage and humane working conditions for the workers, to provide the necessary minimum support for the unemployed and to place certain limits on the autonomy of the employers, when it is necessary for the promotion of the common good.⁹⁹

6.3 Principle of Pluralism

Diversity of language, culture, religion and so on is part of the life of a nation. The principle of pluralism demands that the identity of each group and community be respected.¹⁰⁰ Conditions must be created for the preservation and promotion of their cultural and religious heritage. Each group or community should be enabled to make its own unique contribution to the welfare of the whole society. In this connection, John Paul II calls attention to the danger of fanaticism or fundamentalism of “those who, in the name of an ideology which purports to be scientific

or religious, claim the right to impose on others their own concept of what is true and good.”¹⁰¹

The principle of pluralism is also relevant to the international community. As the pope observes:

Peoples or nations too have a right to their own full development, which while including –as already said – the economic and social aspects should also include individual cultural identity and openness to the transcendent. Not even the need for development can be used as an excuse for imposing on others one’s own way of life or religious belief.¹⁰²

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank tend to impose a Western model of development on countries which have radically different cultures. This is not acceptable. “What the pope proposes here is a community of peoples, each with its own unique culture.”¹⁰³ Besides, in this age of globalization cultural imperialism is growing.¹⁰⁴ Well-planned efforts are being made today to create a uniform, consumerist culture in the developing countries of the Third World.¹⁰⁵ This is a violation of the principle of pluralism.

6.4 Social Ownership of the Means of Production

It cannot be affirmed with certainty that John Paul II stands for the “socialization” of the means of production. But I am inclined to believe that his vision of the future society includes such socialization.

It is true that like his predecessors the pope upholds the right to private property. In fact, he asserts that this

right “which is fundamental for the autonomy and development of the person, has always been defended by the Church up to our own day.”¹⁰⁶ It is doubtful whether the arguments put forward to defend *the right to private property* are sufficient to justify *the private ownership of the means of production*. It is significant that John Paul II quotes with approval the following statement of Vatican II:

Private property or some ownership of external goods affords each person the scope needed for personal and family autonomy, and should be regarded as an extension of human freedom . . . Of its nature private property also has a social function which is based on the law of the common purpose of goods (GS 71).¹⁰⁷

The pope points out that the right to private ownership of the means of production is not an untouchable ‘dogma’ of economic life. For “The right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, for the goods are meant for everyone.”¹⁰⁸ This has been constantly taught by the Church. John Paul II explains the basis of this teaching: “God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone. This is *the foundation of the universal destination of the earth’s goods*.”¹⁰⁹ That is why “Christian tradition has never upheld this right (to private ownership) as absolute and untouchable.”¹¹⁰

John Paul II approves of the proposals for making workers sharers in the ownership and management of the means of production:

In the light of the above, the many proposals put forward by experts in Catholic social teaching and by the highest magisterium of the Church take on special significance: proposals for joint ownership of the means of work, sharing by the workers in the management and/or profits of business, so-called shareholding by labour, etc. Whether these various proposals can or cannot be applied concretely, it is clear that recognition of the proper position of labour and the worker in the production process demands various adaptations in the sphere of the right to ownership of the means of production.¹¹¹

In fact, the pope goes a step further. He advocates the socialization of the ownership of the means of production. This is very different from the State ownership of those means, which is equivalent to State capitalism. This is the way he explains his idea of socialization:

We can speak of socializing only when the subject character of society is ensured, that is to say, when on the basis of his work each person is fully entitled to consider himself a part-owner of the great workbench at which he is working with everyone else. A way toward that goal could be found by associating labour with the ownership of capital, as far as possible, and by producing a wide range of intermediate bodies with economic, social and cultural purposes. They would be bodies enjoying real autonomy with regard to the public powers, pursuing their specific aims in honest collaboration with each other and in subordination to the demands of the common good, and they would be living communities both in form and in substance in the sense that the

members of each body would be looked upon and treated as persons encouraged to take an active part in the life of the body.¹¹²

What John Paul II stands for is the ownership of the means of production by various intermediate bodies which enjoy real autonomy with regard to the state. This is necessary because of the subjectivity of labour. It enables the worker to feel that in his/her work he/she is working for him/herself.¹¹³ This demands that he/she be part-owner of the means of production.

No wonder, then, that Gregory Baum speaks of "pope John Paul II's Socialism".¹¹⁴ He believes that the kind of economic system and social order promoted by the pope, especially in *Laborem Exercens*, is "a form of socialism, one in which the subject character of society is safeguarded."¹¹⁵

6.5 Principle of Planning

John Paul II is quite convinced of the need for a systematic planning of the entire life of society, especially the economic life. This is all the more important because of growing unemployment in the world today. As he states:

In order to meet the danger of unemployment and to ensure employment for all, the agents defined here as "indirect employer" must make provisions for overall planning with regard to the different kinds of work by which not only the economic life but also the cultural life of a given society is shaped; they also must give attention to organizing that work in a correct and rational way. In the final analysis this overall concern weighs on the shoulders of the state but it can-

not mean one-sided centralization by the public authorities. Instead, what is in question is a just and rational coordination within the framework of which the initiative of individuals, free groups and local work centres and complexes must be safeguarded, keeping in mind what has been said above with regard to the subject character of human labour.¹¹⁶

In the context of the growing interdependence among the countries of the world today, John Paul II pleads for international collaboration in the process of planning economic life to ensure a just and adequate development for all.¹¹⁷

7. Practical Steps

From among the different concrete proposals the pope puts forward, I shall highlight just two.

7.1 Movements of Solidarity

In *Laborem Exercens*, the pope encourages labour movements aimed at the betterment of the condition of the workers and the removal of poverty and misery. He calls "for ever new movements of solidarity of the workers and with the workers." And he goes on to add:

This solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by the social degrading of the workers and by the growing areas of poverty and even hunger. The Church is firmly committed to this cause and considers it its mission, its service, a proof of its fidelity to Christ, so that it can truly be the "Church of the poor".¹¹⁸

And in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, he is happy about the growing solidarity

among the poor and their efforts to vindicate their rights:

Positive signs in the contemporary world are the *growing awareness* of the solidarity of the poor among themselves, their *efforts to support one another*, and their *public demonstrations* on the social scene which, without recourse to violence, present their own needs and rights in the face of the inefficiency or corruption of the public authorities. By virtue of her own evangelical duty the Church feels called to take her stand beside the poor, to discern the justice of their requests, and to help satisfy them, without losing sight of the good of groups in the context of the common good.¹¹⁹

The Organised, but nonviolent, struggle of the poor and the oppressed for justice is a step towards the new society.

7.2 Interreligious Collaboration

Faced with a world of poverty and hunger, of injustice and oppression, the followers of all religions should collaborate in a common effort to eradicate poverty and misery and to establish justice and peace. For “the estab-

lishment of peace and, as its necessary condition, the development of the whole person and of all peoples, are also *a matter of religion*.”¹²⁰ In fact, the pope feels that all people of good will, even those without an explicit faith, can co-operate in this common venture.

John Paul II is convinced that “the various religions, now and in the future, will have a preeminent role in preserving peace and in building a society worthy of man.”¹²¹ This is particularly relevant to us in the multireligious context of India.

Now to conclude: Inspired as John Paul II is by the Christian faith, he is filled with hope that the struggle for the creation of a new and just society will end in success. As he declares:

The goal of peace, so desired by everyone, will certainly be achieved through the putting into effect of social and international justice, but also through the practice of the virtues which favour togetherness, and which teach us to live in unity, so as to build in unity, by giving and receiving, a new society and a better world.¹²²

Notes

1. Their main documents are: Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891; Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931; John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 1961; John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1963.
2. John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (hereafter *LE*), 1981, 2. It is to be noted that the pope does not always use bias-free language. He speaks of ‘man’ instead of “human beings”.
3. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (hereafter *CA*), 5.
4. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (hereafter *SRS*), 8.
5. *LE* 2.
6. *CA* 3,5.
7. *The Pope’s Vision of a New Society* *The Pope’s Vision of a New Society* RS 41.

8. CA 43.
9. LE 1.
10. SRS 13.
11. SRS15, 42; SA 33.
12. Ibid.
13. SRS 28.
14. SRS18.
15. LE18.
16. SRS18.
17. SRS14.
18. SA 42.
19. SRS 9.
20. SA 37.
21. LE 11.
22. Ibid.
23. LE 1.
24. G. Baum, *The Priority of Labour: A Commentary on Laborem Exercens*, New York: Paulist Press, 1982, p. 13.
25. LE 5,6.
26. G. Baum, *Op. Cit.*, p. 13.
27. Ibid., p. 14.
28. LE 12.
29. LE 8.
30. S. Lourdasamy, "Pope John Paul's Letter on Human Work" *Jeevadhara*, 13 (May 1983) 75, p. 217.
31. LE 1.
32. SRS 20.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. SRS 21.
36. SRS 36.
37. John Paul, *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*, 1984, 16.
38. SRS 36.
39. SRS 14.
40. M.E. Hobgood, "Conflicting Paradigms in Social Analysis", in G. Baum and R. Ellsberg (eds.), *The Logic of Solidarity*, New York: Orbis, 1989, p. 168.
41. SRS 16.
42. See CA 42.
43. See CA 21.
44. CA 35.
45. See CA 33.
46. CA 20.

47. See *CA* 41, 33.
48. *LE* 13.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. *LE* 14.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *CA* 31.
54. *CA* 43.
55. *CA* 34.
56. *CA* 33.
57. *CA* 42.
58. *CA* 34.
59. See *CA* 42, 8; *LE* 14.
60. See *CA* 42.
61. *CA* 58.
62. *SRS* 37.
63. *CA* 13.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*
66. *CA* 24.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *CA* 14.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Ibid.*
72. *Ibid.*
73. *LE* 15.
74. *CA* 24.
75. *CA* 47.
76. *SRS* 46.
77. *Ibid.*
78. *CA* 25.
79. *CA* 46.
80. *Ibid.*
81. *Ibid.*
82. *SRS* 44.
83. *SRS* 28; *CA* 36.
84. *CA* 36.
85. *SRS* 34; *CA* 37.
86. *SRS* 26.
87. *SRS* 38.

88. SRS 26.
89. Ibid.
90. SRS 38.
91. SRS 39.
92. D. Dorr, "Solidarity and Integral Human Development", in G. Baum and R. Ellsberg (eds.), *The Logic of Solidarity*, p. 149.
93. SRS 39.
94. SRS 14.
95. CA 48.
96. CA 14.
97. CA 15.
98. CA 48.
99. CA 15; *LE* 16-20.
100. SRS 14.
101. CA 46.
102. SRS 32
103. D. Dorr, "Solidarity and Integral Human Development", p. 150.
104. J. Petras, "Cultural Imperialism in Late 20th Century", in EPW 1994, p. 2070.
105. See K.N. Panikkar, "Culture and Globalisation", in EPW 1995, p. 374.
106. CA 30.
107. Ibid.
108. *LE* 14.
109. CA 30.
110. *LE* 14.
111. Ibid.
112. Ibid.
113. *LE* 15; SRS 13.
114. G. Baum, *Priority of Labour*, p. 80.
115. Ibid.
116. *LE* 18.
117. Ibid.
118. *LE* 8.
119. SRS 39.
120. SRS 47.
121. CA 60.
122. SRS 39.