



**FAITH, REASON & SOCIETY**

**Edited Volume**

**Class of 2020**

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# Foreword

IT IS MY PLEASURE to introduce this third volume of essays from Röpke-Wojtyła Fellows, these from the 2019-2020 cohort. The Röpke-Wojtyła Fellowship is a program from the Arthur and Carlyse Ciocca Center for Principled Entrepreneurship at the Catholic University of America. It consists in a year-long conversation aimed at addressing important questions in social philosophy, history, economics, and Catholic social teaching. The fellows are senior college students selected from a wide range of American colleges and universities.

Part of the fellowship's purpose is for these young women and men to spend time together in person having actual interactions: We read texts printed on paper, we travel together, we exchange ideas through verbal jousts and formal and informal conversation, and we share meals and experiences. Alas, this year the fellowship, like most things, was affected by Covid-19, and we had to meet online and cancel our trip to Rome.

I am pleased to report that in spite of the virtual nature of our conversations in the latter part of the year, the essays show great vigor and insight. They are the fruits of young and discerning minds pursuing truth, and many of them reflect on urgent topics of our time, such as gender theory, socialism, healthcare, poverty alleviation, religious liberty, and shareholder vs. stakeholder capitalism. The essays are divided into three sections: (a) the human person, (b) liberty and civil society, and (c) business and economics.

I thank all the fellows for making the best out of a unique situation, and for remaining dedicated, joyful, and passionate in spite of the setback. My profound thanks as well to Dr. Elizabeth Shaw for supervising the fellows in the production of this volume, as well as the indefatigable Candace Mottice, our fellowship manager, without whom the program would not have pivoted seamlessly to an online

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setting. I am immensely grateful as well to my other colleagues at the Busch School and at the Ciocca Center for their participation and help.

Dr. Frederic Sautet  
Röpke-Wojtyła Fellowship Director  
The Busch School of Business  
The Catholic University of America

# Uniting the Human Person and the Common Good: Genuine Dependency as a Virtue

*Sarah Becker\**

THE POSTMODERN WORLD upholds autonomy, understood as the capacity to act independently and without others' assistance, as an ultimate good worth pursuing at any cost. Professor of theology Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar, for example, highlights the prominence of "understandings of human life and political society built exclusively on the paradigm of fully mature and autonomous agents."<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, political scientist Laura Davy argues that "society's preoccupation with independent autonomy operates as both a descriptive and prescriptive discourse: not only are people presumed to be self-sufficient and independent in nature, but significant discursive and material pressure is exerted on encouraging them to become so."<sup>2</sup> My personal experience as a nursing assistant at a long-term care facility confirmed these observations about the prevailing norm of autonomy, which was something I struggled with in view of the circumstances of the patients I served on a regular basis. Whether it was a younger woman with multiple sclerosis who could not control

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar, "Gratuity, Embodiment, and Reciprocity: Christian Love and Justice in Light of Human Dependency," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41, no. 2 (2013): 254, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12013>.

<sup>2</sup> Laura Davy, "Between an Ethic of Care and an Ethic of Autonomy: Negotiating Relational Autonomy, Disability, and Dependency," *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 24, no. 3 (June 2019): 105, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2019.1620461>.

her bowel functions or transport herself to the bathroom, or a nonverbal, paralyzed man, or a handicapped woman struggling with anxiety and loneliness – most of my patients would never regain their autonomy. In a world that presents the healthy, independent individual as the normative ideal, their circumstances were deeply uncomfortable to me.

Prioritizing autonomy is not an exclusively modern phenomenon, however. Aristotle, for example, characterizes the “magnanimous man” as profoundly self-sufficient.<sup>3</sup> The value historically attributed to autonomy explains the fact that its opposite, dependency, remains largely unexplored. As Alasdair MacIntyre observes, “from Plato to Moore and since there are usually, with some rare exceptions, only passing references to human vulnerability and affliction and to connections between them and our dependence on others.”<sup>4</sup> In light of this deficiency in both the secular literature and the broader intellectual tradition that gives rise to Catholic social teaching, my aim in this paper is to offer a preliminary exploration of dependency. Specifically, I will identify how the postmodern view of dependency fails to respect both the dignity of the human person and the common good precisely insofar as it equates dependency with helplessness. After rejecting this negative formulation of dependency as privation, I will offer an alternate definition. “Genuine dependency” is what I will call the virtue of properly ordering one’s individual life within broader society and, ultimately, in relation to God himself.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1999), 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Here, the concept of “genuine dependency” is presented as an alternative to the prevailing postmodern idea of dependency. Both senses of dependency are referred to throughout this paper in order to distinguish two competing views. I have chosen to proceed in this way because I believe that the explication and application of Catholic social teaching should give rise to more accurate and perspicacious definitions and thereby reclaim key terms so that they indicate their most genuine meanings. This

In the postmodern view, dependency is typically understood as a negative state of helplessness. One who is dependent cannot exercise free will, choose for himself, and achieve fulfillment by actualizing his capacities, and so dependency implies some defect or deficiency in the human person. Understood this way, postmodern dependency is intelligible only in relation to autonomy. For example, Laura Davy, whom I cited above, declares that “both [autonomy and care for the dependent] are placed in service of the other: autonomy cannot be enabled without care, and care cannot be enabling without respect for autonomy.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, others define autonomy and dependency in terms of each other by adverting to the normal periods of dependence and independence that characterize the average human life-cycle. As philosopher Aaron Cobb observes, no person is entirely autonomous from birth until death, and thus all human beings “are, at best, only temporarily abled.”<sup>7</sup> The codefining nature of autonomy and dependency is not merely conceptual, however; some also extend this relationship to the level of action. Here, dependency is characterized as an opportunity for independent, able-bodied individuals to exercise charity, express compassion, and contribute to a common “fund” of aid from which they might later draw assistance. A mother, for example, cares for her infant daughter with the knowledge that she similarly relied on a caregiver when she herself was a child. She may do so because it allows her to exercise or enhance her own autonomy through the development of parenting skills. Finally, she might care for her infant because she anticipates requiring her daughter’s

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approach resembles the one adopted, for example, by Catholics who comment on the nature of liberty and freedom. Though both “liberty” and “freedom” are frequently mischaracterized in the secular, postmodern world, the Catholic intellectual tradition typically chooses to provide an authentic historical explication of these words, rather than abandon them to misguided usage in popular culture.

<sup>6</sup> Davy, “Between an Ethic of Care,” 102.

<sup>7</sup> Aaron D. Cobb, “Acknowledged Dependence,” *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 41 (2016): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jhv032>.

assistance when she grows old, or because she hopes to help her daughter to become an independent adult. Under this model, postmodern dependency functions transactionally – as an opportunity to repay assistance received from independent individuals in the past, to express independence in the present, and to promote the expression of independence in the future.<sup>8</sup> In short, postmodern dependency is intelligible not in itself but only in relation to autonomy.

Because it instrumentalizes the human person, however, this postmodern account of dependency is in tension with Catholic social teaching's understanding of the common good. Certainly, every person relies on the existence of others in society, but Catholic social teaching maintains that people need each other for more than simply what is useful or convenient. Though necessary for survival, human relationships are about more than man's material needs; indeed, relationships are constitutive of our very nature. Social relationships are an important part of what it means to be human, for man is "essentially a social being."<sup>9</sup> Social activity is intrinsic to human nature, not one of its accidental qualities. At rock bottom our communal existence is a fact, not a choice or an option. Furthermore, as the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* notes, social activity is "the sign that determines man's interior traits and in a sense constitutes his very nature" as something "not exterior to man."<sup>10</sup> Thus, no man can be understood apart from his inherently communal orientation, nor

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<sup>8</sup> Janie B. Butts and Karen L. Rich, "Acknowledging Dependence: A MacIntyrean Perspective on Relationships Involving Alzheimer's Disease," *Nursing Ethics* 11, no. 4 (2004): 404, <https://doi.org/10.1191/0969733004ne712oa>.

<sup>9</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 149, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

can he achieve his individual fulfillment on his own. Rather, fulfillment is possible only in the context of “relational subjectivity.”<sup>11</sup>

These anthropological observations give rise to the Catholic understanding of the common good, which rejects the utilitarian calculus of prioritizing the greatest happiness for the greatest number. An authentically Christian vision of society cannot subordinate the individual to the whole, for the genuine pursuit of the common good cannot be in opposition to the flourishing of any of the persons engaged in this pursuit.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, Catholic social teaching must condemn the postmodern account of dependency that values individuals with limited capacities merely as means to the ends of independent individuals. Moreover, one may appeal to Catholic social teaching in order to promote genuine dependency as something beneficial to both those who experience it and those who assist them, not as something tragic to be avoided or overcome.<sup>13</sup>

The idea that dependent individuals somehow serve the ends of broader society runs the risk of being not only antithetical to a genuine notion of the common good but also in violation of the duty to respect the dignity of the human person. According to this core principle of Catholic social teaching, the person everywhere and always constitutes the ultimate standard of value. Thus, though postmodern dependency might ultimately benefit the community’s overall well-being, it cannot be valued for this reason alone, for any value it possesses is “derive[d] from th[e] foundational good” of “an individual with inherent value.”<sup>14</sup> Postmodern dependency, however, insofar as it emphasizes the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006), 407.

<sup>13</sup> This paper draws a distinction between not only genuine dependency and helplessness but also genuine dependency and the various events and situations that lead to states of helplessness and are themselves often grave physical evils: a tragic accident, the onset of an acute or chronic disease, or a genetic condition linked to extremely short lifespans, for example.

<sup>14</sup> Cobb, “Acknowledged Dependence,” 27.

passivity of those who are dependent, ultimately has no regard for the flourishing of those persons. Furthermore, taken as a state of helplessness, a condition one experiences but does not choose, postmodern dependency cannot be promoted as a virtue in Catholic social teaching. A paralyzed accident victim, for example, may exhibit postmodern dependency yet not through any personal decision of his own. Indeed, all men experience various degrees of helplessness, for “human life is inherently fragile . . . [and] subject to all sorts of vulnerabilities, including disease, disability, impairment, limitation, pain, and, ultimately, death.”<sup>15</sup> To be a virtue, however, genuine dependency must be attained through the interplay of grace and the free consent of the will that constitute an interior habit of soul. As such, it is something that all human beings are capable of choosing regardless of their external circumstances. Certainly, one’s exterior circumstances are relevant, as the paralyzed man might find it easier to cultivate genuine dependency than the able-bodied man; yet even the profoundly disabled individual, though he is dependent in the postmodern sense, does not necessarily possess the virtue of genuine dependency, for this requires the habituation of one’s internal character.

As a virtue, genuine dependency means not losing oneself through helplessness but instead finding fulfillment through the development of authentic personality. As Jacques Maritain notes, “man must realize through his will that of which his nature is but the sketch. . . . [M]an must become what he is . . . in the moral order, must win his liberty and his personality. In other words . . . his action can follow the bent either of personality or of material individuality.”<sup>16</sup> Genuine personality is not cultivated through helplessness, but neither does it

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Maritain and John J. Fitzgerald, “The Person and the Common Good,” *The Review of Politics* 8, no. 4 (October 1946): 434, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500045101>.

consist in the realization of autonomous “material individuality.”<sup>17</sup> Instead, personality is developed when man acknowledges that his unique existence is constituted through interaction with others. Thus, becoming who one is demands a simultaneous respect for both the dignity of one’s own existence and one’s dependence on others. Unlike postmodern dependency, in which the individual is reduced to a means to others’ personal ends, genuine dependency does not compromise or diminish an individual’s personality but instead brings it to completion. Thus, unlike postmodern dependency, genuine dependency is neither a personal defect nor something that stifles man’s nature. Instead, genuine dependency draws man toward authentic forms of self-determination, fulfillment, and expression in accord with his nature as an individual person in community. Cobb summarizes this point:

If humans are essentially dependent, then the goods of human life are manifested within and through human vulnerability. One cannot understand either the goods of human life or the virtues that manifest and produce these goods without attending to human vulnerability. . . . [T]o engage in friendship is to make oneself vulnerable, but it is a vulnerability that deepens and enriches one’s life. This kind of dependence is essential to human flourishing.<sup>18</sup>

Genuine dependency neither opposes human nature nor limits man’s potential but instead is required for the full realization of both. Unlike postmodern dependency, it is not something that detracts from human flourishing and must therefore be redeemed or elevated in order to possess value as an opportunity for the cultivation or expression of independence in others. Instead, genuine dependency is an objective good that contributes to each person’s wholeness regardless of his external capacities. As the proper ordering of one’s

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Cobb, “Acknowledged Dependence,” 29.

individuality within the context of relationships with others and with God, genuine dependency is primarily a disposition of one's internal character. This disposition enables one to view each person as valuable for his own sake but also as incorporated into the common good of the broader society. For example, the genuinely dependent individual recognizes the intrinsic value of persons who are unable to care for themselves. He would never seek to shorten or end the life of a weak, helpless person, not only because that person possesses inherent dignity but also because he recognizes that his own flourishing is bound up with the other's. In this way, he acts on the knowledge of his own reliance upon others – even those who do not directly contribute to his physical survival – knowing that all persons enrich society not in spite of their interconnectedness but precisely because of it. Where his relationship with the divine is concerned, the genuinely dependent individual orients his life toward the worship of God, for he recognizes that his unique existence is predicated upon his status as a creature. This identity as a contingent being further impels him to serve others. Through service, he not only exercises his human capacities and thus brings to realization his own dignity as a person capable of action, but also affirms his status as one among the many and equal adopted children of God. Thus, the actions of the genuinely dependent individual make present, often in visible and tangible ways, both his own dignity as a human being and his indelible relation to others.

While one experiences postmodern dependency precisely owing to bodily, mental, or spiritual limitations, the virtue of genuine dependency is not only universally accessible but indeed fitting for even the most healthy and well-developed individuals. Insofar as genuine dependency is a matter not of one's external qualities or circumstances but, rather, of one's interior disposition, cultivating and expressing dependency as described above are tasks appropriate to both the disabled and their caretakers. It is equally true for each person that his identity as an individual is intelligible only within the context

*Sarah Becker*

of a broader community, and that he requires others in order to flourish. Certainly, the disabled and their caretakers have different levels of independence and capacities for autonomous action in the physical domain. And yet both do well to acknowledge how their lives both contribute to and draw upon the common good, as both are capable of practicing genuine dependency. Understood this way, genuine dependency is present to the extent that one acknowledges his existence as both individual and communal, singular and social.

Unlike postmodern dependency, which in some degree is natural and unchosen for everyone, genuine dependency requires an intentional choice and must be cultivated through certain actions. These actions might include engaging in the practices appropriate to authentic citizenship, accepting needed help from others, participating in a communal liturgical life, and assisting others not merely to express one's own independence or increase that of others but ultimately to promote solidarity and friendship. Self-centered and self-serving activities and tendencies – such as ignorance of the communal effects of one's actions, moral relativism, fear of committing to marriage, and religious practices predicated upon the belief that worship is an individual practice without a social character – stifle genuine dependency. So, too, do actions that lead to collectivism, such as promoting programs that fail to recognize the inherent goodness of self-directed labor. Genuine dependency avoids the vicious extremes of radical individualism, which is nothing other than the belief in one's own independent, self-sufficient existence outside of a broader human and spiritual community, and of an excessive reliance on others, through which one fails to actualize his personality and exist as an authentically unique individual. One who cultivates genuine dependency rejects both extremes – the idea that fulfillment is achievable on one's own as an individual without reference to others, and the idea that one ought to submit to and be supported by a collective whole.

Genuine dependency is the virtue exhibited by the person who develops his individual personality by respecting his inherent relation to his community and to God. A person may be bed-ridden and immobile and yet lack the virtue of genuine dependency if he refuses to acknowledge his nature as social being who relies upon God as his beginning and end. Similarly, one might be in perfect health and materially independent and yet exhibit genuine dependency insofar as he appreciates how he is inherently interconnected with and reliant upon others. Whatever his external circumstances, the person who exemplifies genuine dependency embodies an individuality predicated upon humility and the knowledge of his need for others. He rejects both the instrumentalization of the human person and the idolatry of autonomy.

Avoiding the related errors of viewing dependency as helplessness and as a mere opportunity for the expression or development of autonomy, the genuinely dependent individual respects both the dignity of the person and the duty to promote the common good. As the virtue of appropriately ordering one's life within the broader community, genuine dependency simultaneously respects the dignity of each person and the inherently communal nature of human fulfillment. Genuine dependency is thus not only a positive and integral requirement for human flourishing but also a foundational element of Catholic social teaching that enables each person to understand and cultivate his own identity through his relationships with others.

# The Utopia of Neuter: Gender Theory and the Catholic Understanding of Man

*Michelle Bennett\**

A FUNDAMENTAL MISUNDERSTANDING of the human person plagues our society. It reduces man<sup>1</sup> either to his sentiments and subjective experience or to his matter. This reduction occurs as a result of the powerful gender theory movement that prioritizes a person's perceived sexual identity, making that identity one's defining characteristic.<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict XVI calls this ideological shift an "anthropological revolution" insofar as gender theorists have overthrown, uprooted, and reversed the traditional understanding of man.<sup>3</sup> Those who proclaim the separation of sex from gender and promote man's sexuality as the primary source of personal identity fall into two camps, constructionists and determinists, that can be traced back to the thought of René Descartes and Francis Bacon, respectively. This fundamental misunderstanding of the human person has not developed overnight; rather, it has been gaining ground with each decade, becoming most prevalent since the turn of twentieth century. These ideologies can be overcome by a more holistic understanding of man. I argue that although these ideologies may contain partial truths,

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<sup>1</sup> Where "man" is separate from "woman," the use of "man" is intended as "human."

<sup>2</sup> Although not defined by traditional gender norms, I would argue that this perception is governed by the gender norms of contemporary society in the sense that the culture promotes such perceptions.

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, "Address to the Roman Curia" (December 21, 2012).

they are insufficient: A Catholic anthropology presents the fullness of the truth about human nature by proclaiming a more complete and integrated understanding of man and woman.

Scientific advancements, philosophical developments, and numerous other movements of the twentieth century have led to “gender essentialism,” the idea that what is most essential to man and his identity is his sex or gender.<sup>4</sup> The terms “sex” and “gender” are often used interchangeably, but their distinction is important here. My aim is to describe the social and scientific movements of the twentieth century that led to the constructionist and determinist shifts in anthropology through an investigation of key social progressions of the twentieth century; to investigate the anthropological teaching, philosophy, and scholarship of the Catholic Church; and finally to propose ways to reconcile these two views of human nature.

Although the general public tends to use “sex” and “gender” interchangeably, to investigate this issue effectively we must differentiate these two terms. The most common working definition of sex takes it to be binary and biologically determined by phenotypical or genotypical indicators.<sup>5</sup> The most common method of sex identification is the phenotypic observation of the external genitalia, but sex can also be identified genotypically by genetic testing. Gender, on the other hand, is defined by the attributes of “maleness or femaleness or the associated behaviors and psychological identity of masculinity and femininity.” Others add that gender is “a social construction that varies across different cultures and over time.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Bucar, “Bodies at the Margins: The Case of Transsexuality in Catholic and Shia Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38 (2010): 603, available at [www.academia.edu/1344121/\\_Bodies\\_at\\_the\\_margins\\_the\\_case\\_for\\_transsexuality\\_incatholic\\_and\\_shi\\_i\\_ethics\\_journal\\_of\\_religious\\_ethics\\_38.4\\_2010\\_601-615](http://www.academia.edu/1344121/_Bodies_at_the_margins_the_case_for_transsexuality_incatholic_and_shi_i_ethics_journal_of_religious_ethics_38.4_2010_601-615).

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization, “Gender and Genetics,” available at <https://www.who.int/genomics/gender/en/index1.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Bucar, “Bodies at the Margins,” 602.

These definitions help to provide greater clarity when discussing the anthropological shifts of interest here.

### *Philosophical Influences*

How did we come to these distinctions between sex and gender? Why do we have both terms? For most of this history of Western civilization, men and women have existed in a dichotomous social structure in which males and females were distinct; however, this historical social structure is increasingly challenged. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought the rising tides of many modern philosophical and psychological schools that rejected traditional means of obtaining knowledge and of understanding man. These modern trends, along with great technological advancements, upset the prevailing order and soon captivated many thinkers who were particularly influenced by Cartesian philosophy, with its focus on consciousness and subjective reality.<sup>7</sup> Descartes emphasizes man's ability to intuit and deduce truths from his intellect and is skeptical of the integration of mind and body.<sup>8</sup> His meditation on the wax candle reveals his fundamental distrust of the bodily senses and skepticism with respect to man's ability to know anything with certainty through the use of them.<sup>9</sup> Cartesian skepticism was thus in tension with an earlier emphasis on external, objective reality as the source of knowledge.

These shifts resulted in the questioning and rejection of fundamental truths about the human person, one being our embodied nature. Descartes's influence is apparent in the idea of gender identity

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<sup>7</sup> Janet Smith, "The Universality of Natural Law and the Irreducibility of Personalism," *Nova et Vetera* 11, no. 4 (2013): 1229-47.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Markie, "Rationalism vs. Empiricism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rationalism-empiricism/#IntuThes>.

<sup>9</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Second Meditation, sec. 4.

and the manifestation of gender dysphoria.<sup>10</sup> If consciousness is all that matters, or what defines your existence, then what significance at all does your physical biology have? If truth exists only insofar as you can intuit or deduce it, what prevents you from deducing or constructing an alternative gender identity untethered to your biological sex? From Descartes's doubt sprouted a rejection of the givenness and authority of objective physical reality. The rise of rationalism contributed to the rejection of the integrated body, mind, and soul that had historically dominated, and paved the way for an anthropology that separates bodily sex and intuited gender. This ideology is prominent in the sex and gender debate.

Sigmund Freud meditates on this question and popularizes challenges to the traditional conception of sex and sexual behavior. Freud emphasized the importance of the "libido," the sexual hunger that he claimed defines much of the person.<sup>11</sup> Along with his emphasis on sexual drive, Freud described the "aberrations" of libido that result in sexual deviancy.<sup>12</sup> His work brought sexuality to the forefront of modern thought,<sup>13</sup> increasing the frequency of questions about sexuality in the field of psychology and for many others concerned with human behavior. Increased intellectual interest in sexuality gave rise to significant questions about male and female roles and relations. Such questions are characteristic of Freud's work and have had a tendency to promote forms of sexual deviancy whereby men and women to interact with one another primarily for the sake of bodily

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, "The Universality of Natural Law and the Irreducibility of Personalism," 36.

<sup>11</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," available at <https://doi.org/10.1037/e417472005-178>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>13</sup> See Marcella Tarrozzi, "What Freud Has to Teach Us about Sex and Gender," available at <https://www.apadivisions.org>; and Emily Allen and Dino Felluga, *General Introduction to Theories of Gender and Sex* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2002).

pleasure.<sup>14</sup> This perspective on sexuality has corroded the traditional sense of the distinctiveness of the sexes and fostered a view of sex as self-determined, by the construction of whatever role a person wants to take in his relationships with others. The ability to construct your role obscures the distinction between the sexes and thus plays a large part in the development of constructionism.

As Cartesian and Freudian theories provided the foundation for constructionism, Francis Bacon significantly impacted early modern scientific communities and the foundation of determinism. Because Bacon promoted the advancement of science for the betterment of man and the use of the scientific method for the improvement of man's power over nature, he is often understood as promoting unlimited or unchecked human power.<sup>15</sup> Bacon praises the man who "earnestly desires . . . to win victories over nature" and calls such a man "the true son of science."<sup>16</sup> The Baconian worldview has been dominant among scientists for centuries. And yet modern science, while following the path of Bacon, seems to have forgotten a central tenet of his philosophy, namely, that "man, as servant and interpreter of nature, is limited in act and understanding by his observation of the natural order."<sup>17</sup> Bacon's emphasis on respect for the "observation of the natural order" was largely forgotten,<sup>18</sup> and scientific progress has often wrought unforeseen, harmful consequences. For example, so-called Thalidomide babies are children who were born with serious physical defects resulting from their mothers' consumption of an undertested pharmaceutical.<sup>19</sup> This *modus operandi* is rampant in the

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<sup>14</sup> Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," 217.

<sup>15</sup> Francis Bacon, *Novus Organum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 33.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>18</sup> Madeline Muntersbjorn, "Francis Bacon's Philosophy of Science: Machina Intellectus and Forma Indita," *Philosophy of Science* 70, no. 5 (2003): 1148, available at <https://doi:10.1086/377395>.

<sup>19</sup> Neil Vargesson, "Thalidomide-Induced Teratogenesis: History and

contemporary scientific community and especially apparent, for example, in hormone and hormone therapy research.

In the twentieth century, the discovery of the objective difference in the sex chromosomes of males and females was supported by the discovery of hormones and their regulatory functions.<sup>20</sup> In 1905 Ernest Starling discovered the first hormone and inaugurated this field of research. The power and knowledge to be gained from understanding the elusive nature of hormones interested many researchers, including Sergio Voronoff, who experimented with transplanting animals' testes into the abdomens of men to increase their testosterone levels and ultimately their libidos.<sup>21</sup> Hormone research opened up new horizons for treatments and offered scientists a better understanding of the nature and influences of human behavior. But it has also given rise to the manipulation of otherwise healthy bodily organs and processes. Early research led to later developments including hormonal birth control, hormone replacement therapy, and the hormonally induced sex "transitions" – all of which were motivated by scientists' asking "Can we do this?" and not "Should we do this?"

The perversion of Baconian philosophy favored empirical knowledge over all other forms and was associated with the development of a biological determinist ideology that asserts that biological factors alone are significant.<sup>22</sup> This philosophical shift has critical importance for our understanding of human nature. Biological

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Mechanisms," *Birth Defects Research Part C: Embryo Today: Reviews* 105, no. 2 (2015): 146, available at <https://doi.org/10.1002/bdrc.21096>.

<sup>20</sup> Jens Henriksen and Ove Schaffalitzky, "Secretin, Its Discovery, and the Introduction of the Hormone Concept," *Scandinavian Journal of Clinical and Laboratory Investigation* 60, no. 6 (2000): 4670, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/003655100448446>.

<sup>21</sup> Eberhard Nieschlag and Susan Nieschlag, "Testosterone Deficiency: A Historical Perspective," *Asian Journal of Andrology* 16, no. 2 (2014): 161, available at <https://doi.org/10.4103/1008-682x.122358>.

<sup>22</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

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determinism is a reaction against constructionism and is not as common. If man can know and trust only his subjective reality,<sup>23</sup> or only what has been proven by scientific experiment,<sup>24</sup> can he have any sort of faith or understanding of the transcendentals? What do goodness, truth, and beauty mean to a scientist seeking statistical significance, or to a man who can construct his own idea of goodness, truth, and beauty?

A commitment to “relative” or empirical truths, outside a framework of universal objectivity, leaves man devoid of all truth and real purpose. Instead, he is always and insatiably reaching for the next personal gratification. A single-minded pursuit of knowledge risks stripping man of his dignity and rendering him a tool for some other intellectual purpose. These ideologies distort man’s nature and natural inclination for God so much that they necessarily leave man unfulfilled and trapped in a cult of the ego.

The adoption of these two schools of thought has challenged the traditional understanding of male–female interactions and has forced man to question an essential element of his being, producing a crisis of identity. When human realities are thought to be either constructed or materially determined, such ideologies give rise to serious and unprecedented questions concerning human nature and sexuality.

### *Social Changes*

At the beginning of the last century, scientists made significant discoveries regarding biological sex. In 1917 the field of genetics took off with the discovery of the X and Y chromosomes that are the primary sex indicators.<sup>25</sup> An especially important discovery was the

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<sup>23</sup> An opposed but contemporary philosophy that also had an extensive influence.

<sup>24</sup> Muntersbjorn, *How Sex Changed*, 1148.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Keieleber, “How Chromosomes X and Y Got Their Names, 1891,” *The Scientist Magazine*, available at <https://www.the->

SRY gene on the Y chromosome, which directs the hormone cascade responsible for male development. This empirical data intrigued the scientific community, and soon many scientists were searching for other genetic and environmental factors affecting sexuality and other areas of life.

While the biological understanding of what it means to be male or female was increasing, social changes were also afoot. There was growing criticism of social structures and traditional presumptions regarding the nature and abilities of men and women. Feminist ideology emerged in the twentieth century, and a significant promoter of that ideology, Simone de Beauvoir, called for a moral revolution that would liberate women from their homes and bring them into the workplace alongside men.<sup>26</sup> In time the sexual revolution brought with it an ever increasing radical feminism and greater sensitivity to sex and gender issues.

Downplaying and denying differences between women and men in the social context led to more questions about what sex and gender really are and, in turn, to constructionist answers that make gender a cultural construction, something totally unrelated to the physical realities of the body and to be overcome in pursuit of equality.<sup>27</sup> Liberation was taken to mean eliminating the inequality of women and men, based on the idea that the differences between the sexes were not natural but socially imposed.<sup>28</sup> This perspective aimed at the abolition of sex altogether by obscuring the differences between the sexes. Thus,

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scientist.com/foundations/how-chromosomes-x-and-y-got-their-names--1891-65508.

<sup>26</sup> Debra Bergoffen and Megan Burke, "Simone de Beauvoir," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/beauvoir/>.

<sup>27</sup> Bucar, "Bodies at the Margins," 607.

<sup>28</sup> Charlene Muehlenhard and Zoe D. Peterson, "Distinguishing Between Sex and Gender: History, Current Conceptualizations, and Implications," *Sex Roles* 64, nos. 11-12 (2011): 800, available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9932-5>.

constructionist thinkers envisioned and sought what might be called a “utopia of the neuter.” This utopia would destabilize the family structure by dissolving the male–female dynamic at the foundation of the family.

At the same time, sex and gender questions became dominant in psychology. Some researchers favoring the social-construct model of gender went so far as to deny any biological basis of sex (at this time more often referred to as gender). They took cues, in part, from the Cartesian schism of mind and body and skepticism regarding the senses.<sup>29</sup> Doubt regarding the integrated nature of sex and gender gives rise to the idea that biological sex does not necessarily determine gender.<sup>30</sup> The John/Joan Reimer case is worth considering in this regard. A predominant social thinker, John Money, attempted to raise one of a pair of identical boys as a girl by means of social conditioning, psychological counseling, hormone treatments, and surgical reconstruction.<sup>31</sup> “Joan” suffered from gender dysphoria and attempted suicide at age 10, finally causing his parents to reveal the truth of his male identity.<sup>32</sup> This facts of this case strongly suggest that sexuality is not a simple social construct but, rather, something that necessarily involves individuals’ biological identities as well.

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<sup>29</sup> Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy: From Descartes to Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2001), 27.

<sup>30</sup> Ray Blanchard, Leonard H. Clemmensen, and Betty W. Steiner, “Heterosexual and Homosexual Gender Dysphoria,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 16, no. 2 (1987): 142, available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01542067>.

<sup>31</sup> See Deborah David, John Money, and Anke A. Ehrhardt, “Man and Woman, Boy and Girl,” *Contemporary Sociology* 3, no. 4 (1974): 302, available at <https://doi.org/10.2307/2061919>; Thomas Gershick and John Colapinto, “As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl,” *Teaching Sociology* 30, no. 2 (2002): 267, available at <https://doi.org/10.2307/3211394>.

<sup>32</sup> Blanchard et al., “Heterosexual and Homosexual Gender Dysphoria,” 143; Gershick and Colapinto, “As Nature Made Him,” 267.

The Reimer case backfired for Money and failed to support his theory, but at the time and for decades after he continued to promote a socialization theory of gender. Money and likeminded contemporaries peddled the dangerous idea that sex and gender can be separated. I call it “dangerous” because it leads to a fundamental misunderstanding of the human person, chiefly by misidentifying a personally constructed or perceived gender identity as the most important aspect of human nature.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in the case of biological determinism, sex is misidentified as the defining characteristic of the human person. This mode of thinking is wrong because sex and gender are meant to influence and shape our perceptions of the world and ourselves but not to be the sole source or measure of human fulfillment.<sup>34</sup>

In contemporary society, sex and gender issues have become disastrously contentious. Many no longer affirm the natural distinctions between male and female, and they opt instead to deny them entirely. Gender fluidity and a sea of changing personal pronouns are now the norm under the ideal of a utopia of neuter. Because gender and sex have become determining aspects of man’s identity, “misidentifying” individuals and using the wrong pronouns are now serious social offenses. The idea that gender and sex are not related has become mainstream and is taken as an important feature of a “more free and just society.”<sup>35</sup>

So how should we understand sex and gender? Where can we find the truth? Modern and postmodern thinkers have rejected traditional philosophical anthropology in favor of a set of confused and internally inconsistent theories of human nature.<sup>36</sup> Where can society look to regain a grasp of the objective truth about human nature and sexuality?

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<sup>33</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2006), 16.

<sup>34</sup> *Laudato si'*, 155.

<sup>35</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the Bishops of Puerto Rico” (2015); Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 150.

<sup>36</sup> Gary Aylesworth, “Postmodernism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

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*Catholic Teaching*

There is partial truth in the thought of determinists and constructionists; however, neither adequately understands the fullness of truth. The Catholic Church offers the most complete understanding of human nature and sexuality. In what follows, I will first examine Church teaching and scholarship regarding the nature of these relationships, and then the Church's response to the utopia of the neuter.

To address the question of man and woman, we do well to return to the very beginning, the book of Genesis. The author of Genesis describes humanity's original "primordial duality," which is revealed at the origins in two distinct persons, Adam and Eve.<sup>37</sup> From these first parents a better understanding of masculinity and femininity can be derived. They are defined as "qualities of communion and complementarity."<sup>38</sup> Pope St. John Paul II describes the encounter between man and woman as "the very origins of human society."<sup>39</sup> The fullness of humanity is expressed when the dual nature of the sexes come together.<sup>40</sup> Man's embodiment as sexed "serves as a defining element of the human being."<sup>41</sup> Note, however, that it is *a* defining element, not *the* defining element.

The Catholic Church takes a holistic view of the human person while affirming the central fact that our nature is God-given. The differences between man and woman are important and not arbitrary; indeed, they are "willed by God." The *Catechism* elaborates that these differences have to do with not only the physical bodies of man and woman but with "how they relate to one another and to the world."<sup>42</sup>

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available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/>.

<sup>37</sup> Gen 2:7-25.

<sup>38</sup> *Letter to Families*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2332.

<sup>41</sup> Benedict XVI, "Address to the Roman Curia."

<sup>42</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2332.

Our embodied nature, along with “multiple elements having to do with temperament, family history, culture, experience, education, the influence of friends, family members and respected persons, as well as other formative situations,” all serve to shape the Catholic understanding of man.<sup>43</sup> This multifaceted analysis is an important part of the holistic approach of Catholic anthropology.

Contrary to most secular views of human nature, the Church teaches that the function of sex is formative in that it largely shapes the way a person sees the world. The personal union of spirit and body is central in Catholic anthropology and integral to the understanding of the body as sexed from its very conception. John Paul II describes the sexed body as “constitutive for the person” and emphasizes that this aspect of man is not merely attributive. He elaborates that the sexed nature of man demonstrates “how deeply man, with all his spiritual solitude, with the uniqueness and unrepeatability proper to the person, is constituted by the body as ‘he’ or ‘she.’”<sup>44</sup> Another Catholic scholar, Janet Smith, defends the constitutive nature of sexed bodies as a safeguard against the “objectification and selfish use” of man’s sexual nature, and she warns that when an understanding of male–female complementarity is lost, relations between the sexes devolve to lust “that can be filled by any person, man or woman.”<sup>45</sup> This devolution can already be observed in contemporary society in the ways that the “hook-up culture” has encouraged sexual experimentation, as well as the familiar account of gender identity and sexual orientation as fluid and on a spectrum or continuum.

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<sup>43</sup> *Amoris laetitia*, 286.

<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, “Theology of the Body,” 10.1.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, “The Universality of Natural Law and the Irreducibility of Personalism,” 1238.

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*Catholic Response*

Male and female cannot be on the same spectrum. If they are, as two poles, then there is a middle region of neuter that soon dominates the entire spectrum. The area of neuter is problematic because in denying man's very nature it leads to confusion. People naturally desire knowledge and certainty, but the idea of a sliding-scale or spectrum does not offer certainty with respect to one's self-knowledge. It is not good for man because it leads him away from the truth about his identity,<sup>46</sup> truth that is naturally inscribed within himself. John Paul II states that "sexual difference is a sign of our call to love, to communion, inscribed within who we are, including our very bodies."<sup>47</sup> The neuter area is not a genuine human reality, for it does not allow for the necessary communion and complementarity of persons. When like combines with like, the result is just more of the same; whereas, if two distinct entities come together, the product is unique and distinct from either of the originals, and true communion can be experienced.

Male and female are two distinct categories,<sup>48</sup> but it may be fair to say that their derivatives, masculinity and femininity, can be thought of in terms of a spectrum that is largely determined by cultural norms. Pope Francis acknowledges that not all behaviors can be neatly placed in "rigid categories," and that females may exhibit some masculine behaviors and males some feminine behaviors. Although males and females may express their masculinity and femininity differently (especially from culture to culture), he unambiguously maintains the distinctness of the two sexes. He emphasizes that "biological sex and

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<sup>46</sup> *Amoris laetitia*, 286.

<sup>47</sup> Benedict XVI, "Address to the Roman Curia."

<sup>48</sup> Intersex people do exist and are termed so from indeterminable genetic or physical characteristics. This paper seeks to provide answers to common questions and will not account for such exceptions. I survey the general population but acknowledge that rare exceptions are possible.

the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.”<sup>49</sup>

This teaching is hard, and like Jesus’s disciples one may wonder, “Who can accept it?” Although challenging, it is essential for man to live in truth.<sup>50</sup> The complementary nature of male–female sexuality is the necessary building block from which human beings beget offspring.

Moreover, Pope Francis explains that it is “through sexual difference” that men and women are able “to relate to one another in profoundly personal ways.”<sup>51</sup> He asserts that from encounters with the opposite sex, they find “mutual enrichment.”<sup>52</sup> This mutual enrichment presents itself in “our most basic relationships as members of a family” and in our capacity to “be united with others in friendship and community.”<sup>53</sup> Finally, the pope points to the rejection of sexual difference as a reason why people “no longer know how to confront it.”<sup>54</sup> This situation can be corrected by reaffirming the purpose of the sexed nature of man and woman, namely, communion and generation. The differences between man and woman can be rediscovered, for as John Paul II so beautifully describes, “[f]emininity in some way finds itself before masculinity, while masculinity confirms itself through femininity.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, through intimate and authentic encounters that reveal two distinct creatures, man and woman, the false utopia of neuter can be overcome.

These intimate encounters between man and woman are the foundational building block of society. From this “reciprocity and communion of persons” derives the human family, and from this

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<sup>49</sup> *Amoris laetitia*, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Jn 6:60.

<sup>51</sup> *Laudato si'*, 155.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Benedict XVI, “Address to the Roman Curia.”

<sup>54</sup> *Amoris laetitia*, 155.

<sup>55</sup> John Paul II, “Theology of the Body,” 10.1.

family a community is formed with other families. In time, this community forms a larger society and establishes governing structures.<sup>56</sup> The first communion of persons cannot occur between two of the same; it naturally requires two differently sexed persons. Furthermore, their coming together is “not for opposition or subordination, but for communion and generation, always in the ‘image and likeness’ of God.” Communion and generation are how man expresses his likeness to God and fulfills his “true human freedom” by rightly ordering himself and accepting that he “did not create himself.”<sup>57</sup> Without the essential communion of two persons who are differently sexed, society never emerges. Male–female complementarity and the resultant communion of persons into family is the first step in the founding of society.

Man benefits from the more holistic understanding of himself that the Catholic Church provides, but how do we promote this understanding? I argue that it must first be promoted through individual and personal encounters and relationships. The truth and love integrated into the Catholic understanding of man must be expressed by mirroring Christ’s love and truth in relationships. This kindness ought not to stop at Christian charity; it ought to extend to sharing the *kerygma*, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, with those we encounter. Through Christian witness and goodwill, hearts will undoubtedly be converted. By communicating the love of Christ, particularly as expressed in his carrying and dying on the cross, we are encouraged to do the same in our lives.

### *Conclusion*

From this look at the philosophical, psychological, and biological influences on contemporary man’s perception of himself, we see that he is suffering from a fundamental misunderstanding of his identity.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 14.4.

<sup>57</sup> Benedict XVI, “Address to the Roman Curia.”

Many today suffer from gender dysphoria as well as the false idea that their personhood is sexually determined. Yet the fullness and complex nature of man cannot be reduced to a singular identity of biological sex or of self-constructed gender; one always ought to be understood as a multifaceted individual who is a part of a greater society. From the constructionism and determinism that grew out of the Cartesian and Baconian schools, to the rise of feminism and contemporary science, to the claim that gender is a social construct and the idea that empirical data rules above all, man has traveled far from the traditional understanding of sex and gender in terms of the primordial duality of the sexes.

Sex and gender are much more than simple biological facts, and they are not things that one simply constructs on one's own. I argue that the human person cannot declare a singular element of his or her being, sex, as the whole of his or her personal identity. Indeed, sex and gender are fundamental for understanding the fullness of the whole human person. The reductions of both schools, constructionist and determinist, always leave us desiring more. The Catholic Church presents the fullness of the truth and a holistic anthropology that integrates both sex and gender in a complete understanding of human nature. The Church affirms that only through the relationship of man and woman can the fullness of the person be expressed. Though it may be currently fashionable, the utopia of the neuter fundamentally misunderstands the person and the right order of human relationships. Moreover, the greater issues at hand are the loss of true communion with our fellow man and of our right relation with our Creator.

# Mutual Helpmates: Sexual Complementarity in the Workplace

*Mary Katherine Rackers\**

**D**ESPITE THE PROGRESS MADE against sexual discrimination during the last century, true gender equality in the workplace still remains unattained. To be sure, women now make up nearly half (47 percent) of the United States labor force, but studies show that women are still twice as likely as their male counterparts to experience discrimination at work on account of their gender.<sup>1</sup> This discrimination manifests itself in multiple forms, including repeated slights, lack of support, being denied promotions or turned down for positions, and earning less than male peers for doing the same job.<sup>2</sup> While such experiences are relatively uncommon for males (occurring among 22 percent of working men), four in ten working women (42 percent) report gender discrimination in their professional lives.<sup>3</sup> As a remedy, it has been proposed that we take a “gender-blind” approach

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<sup>1</sup> A. W. Geiger and Kim Parker, “For Women’s History Month, a look at gender gains – and gaps – in the U.S.,” available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/15/for-womens-history-month-a-look-at-gender-gains-and-gaps-in-the-u-s/>.

<sup>2</sup> Kim Parker and Cary Funk, “Gender discrimination comes in many forms for today’s working women,” available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/12/14/gender-discrimination-comes-in-many-forms-for-todays-working-women/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

that entirely separates issues of sex and work.<sup>4</sup> Such an approach presupposes that one's sex has no bearing on the work one does and, therefore, that one deserves equal opportunities, equal pay, and most importantly the equal indifference of others to one's sex.

While separating sex from professional life can be conceived in theory, lived experience seems to suggest that such radical detachment is seldom achieved in practice. We do not experience ourselves as male or female only in matters where the physical and biological components of masculinity or femininity are required, nor do we conceive of our gender – the lived manifestation of our sexual nature – as existing only in situations that are expressly sexual.<sup>5</sup> In much the same way that one does not consider oneself different persons in the office and at home (although different circumstances might call for emphasizing different facets of one's personality), so too one does not experience oneself as gendered one moment and genderless the next. For example, I am not always actively aware of my gender and sexuality, in much the same way that I am not always conscious of each body part or other essential aspects of my being. Yet I know that at all times, just as I remain the selfsame person throughout the myriad actions I perform, so too I always remain a woman while I perform them. Our sexuality is far more an essential part our personhood than those who would advocate for gender blindness might have us believe. For this reason, in order to come to a better understanding of how

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<sup>4</sup> For an example of an argument for gender blindness, see Aaran Fronda, "Gender blindness is the real measure of workplace equality," *World Finance* (January 13, 2016), available at <https://www.worldfinance.com/strategy/why-gender-blindness-is-the-real-measure-of-equality>.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this paper, I will use the terms "sex" and "gender" to describe phenomena that are closely related but not synonymous. By "sex" I mean the physical, biological, and embodied reality of a person's identity as male or female, and by "gender" I mean the way in which an individual's sex is manifested throughout his or her lived experience as masculine or feminine. The two cannot be separated, yet neither is reducible to the other.

work and gender are integrated, it is necessary first to establish a solid understanding of the embodied person who lives and works as a sexual and thus gendered being.

In working toward this robust anthropology, I will turn to the writings of two key Catholic intellectuals of the twentieth century, Pope John Paul II and Edith Stein. Both show a deep concern for the human person and the need for a proper understanding of human sexuality. In his encyclicals on work and his Wednesday audiences comprising the *Theology of the Body*, John Paul repeatedly refers to the book of Genesis, arguing that its account of creation reveals fundamental truths about human nature, especially regarding sexuality and human work. From the beginning, man and woman are created as “mutual helpmates” for each other in work, a crucial feature of the male–female relationship upon which Edith Stein also reflects in her writings on women in the workplace. As she explores how each gender gives rise to a distinctive ethos at work, Stein argues strongly against discrimination while still emphasizing that an awareness of sexual difference must not be eliminated from the professional sphere. Drawing from the insights of both John Paul II and Edith Stein, I will argue that the biblical truth of sexual complementarity should inform our approach to issues of work and sexuality. Specifically, I will argue that it is precisely because of their differences, not in spite of them, that man and woman can serve as helpmates to each other at work.

## I

Before examining the relation between work and sexual complementarity in the practical sphere, it will be helpful first to turn to its theological roots. In his 1981 encyclical *Laborem exercens*, John Paul follows such an approach. While addressing the social and economic concerns of his own time, he grounds his analysis in a rich exegesis of the meaning of work as established at the moment of creation. Although admitting that scripture oftentimes speaks in an

“archaic way,” the pope argues that it still reveals “the fundamental truths of man,” including the truth about work, “in the context of the mystery of creation itself.”<sup>6</sup> In particular, he focuses on Genesis and its description of the original covenant between the human person and the Creator, in which God charges Adam and Eve with their duties to each other and to the rest of creation, telling them to be fruitful, fill the earth, and subdue it:

These truths are decisive for man from the very beginning, and at the same time they trace out the main lines of his earthly existence, both in the state of original justice and also after the breaking, caused by sin, of the Creator’s original covenant with creation in man. When man, who had been created ‘in the image of God . . . male and female,’ hears the words: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it,’ even though these words do not refer directly and explicitly to work, beyond any doubt they indirectly indicate it as an activity for man to carry out in the world.<sup>7</sup>

As the first command given to Adam and Eve following their creation, this twofold call describes the role of sexuality and the meaning of humanity in its sexual duality. At the same time it refers to the activity that will define human life: work.

While much can be said regarding the call to work and the nature of work as a distinctively human action, it is significant to note that this call is but a part of the original covenant with the Creator and that it comes after the primary call to love as male or female. Immediately before the command to subdue and hold dominion over the earth, the man and the woman are called to “be fruitful and multiply,” which is an appeal to their spousal unity. John Paul draws upon the meaning of spousal unity in his *Theology of the Body*, arguing that it comes from an original solitude: “the created man” in “the first moment of his

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<sup>6</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

existence *before God* in search of his own being.”<sup>8</sup> The biblical text calls attention to this solitude when God says, “It is not good that the man (male) should be alone; I want to make him a help similar to himself.”<sup>9</sup> As the creation narrative continues, it becomes clear that this new “help” is the woman, and that in her femininity she stands as another “incarnation” of the way in which “the same human being, created ‘in the image of God’ (Gen 1:27) ‘is a body.’”<sup>10</sup> This distinction does not exist on the merely physical level but, rather, is “constitutive for the person,” showing “how deeply man, with all his spiritual solitude, with the uniqueness and unrepeatability proper to the person, is constituted by the body as ‘he’ or ‘she’.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the physical differentiation of sexuality reveals a deeper distinction within the inmost being of one’s personhood, making it so that a person exists as “he” or “she,” male or female. The two bodily forms thus constitute two distinct ways of being a person.

Given the constitutive nature of sexuality on the individual and the personal levels, it is important to remember that, while sexuality leads to fruitfulness, it does not exist exclusively for the sake of propagating the human race. That is an important reason why sexuality exists, but, as indicated by the language of “becoming one flesh” used in Genesis and emphasized by John Paul, it also points toward the profound unity meant to be shared between man and woman as subjects and persons, not only as fleshly beings.<sup>12</sup> While this unity can be most clearly seen with reference to the conjugal act – in which that unity becomes incarnate – its intersubjective nature is evinced by the fact that woman is created as a help to man. This language of a help must not be understood as a degradation of woman; rather, it speaks of a mutual

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<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 149.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-47; Gen 2:18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

help, one that could exist only between two equal persons. John Paul argues that such a situation of help would be better described as *communio personarum* – the communion of persons – because “it indicates precisely the ‘help’ that derives in some way from the very fact of existing as a person ‘beside’ a person.”<sup>13</sup> Through their own communion of persons, man and woman image the divine *communio personarum* of the persons of the Trinity, their love and intimacy bringing life to a third. While the sexual union reveals itself in physical fruitfulness, it remains profoundly intersubjective at its heart, involving not merely male and female bodies but male and female persons.

While the spiritual dimension of spousal unity cannot be overstated, it is also important to bear in mind that this call to unity, to be a help to one another, is given in the context of the human vocation to hold dominion over the earth and all living things – that is, to work. Woman is created as “a help similar to [man] himself,” her similarity lying in the fact that she too is a human person called to this same task. When thus considered as the call of human persons created to love, human work manifests a profound depth of meaning: It not only is a distinctive human activity but also is meant to be completed alongside and with the help of other human subjects. Work is not an isolated endeavor but something decidedly intersubjective in nature. This intersubjectivity occurs not only on the level of spouses but also on the broader level of humanity as a whole, as it manifests itself through both masculinity and femininity and is united in this diversity. John Paul writes in his *Letter to Women*,

The creation of woman is thus marked from the outset by the principle of help: a help that is not one-sided but *mutual*. Woman complements man, just as man complements woman: men and women are complementary. Womanhood

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

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expresses the 'human' as much as manhood does, but in different and complementary ways.<sup>14</sup>

From the time of creation, man and woman are meant to share a profound unity that does not remain restricted to the sexual act; rather, since sexuality constitutes the person, masculinity and femininity correspond and complement each other in other aspects of lived personal experience as well, making it so that the two genders can be genuine helpmates in all areas of life.

## II

The integration of work and sexuality can be seen not only on this primordial and biblical level but also in everyday practical experience. This claim might seem questionable; after all, when the topic of gender in the workplace arises, it usually does so against the backdrop of deep-rooted discrimination. Particularly for women, sex is seen as an obstacle to their professional pursuits, not as something deeply and dynamically integral to their professional lives. While the injustice of sexual discrimination is a reality that must be acknowledged, we do not overcome it by denying the interwoven account of sex and work derived from Genesis. Quite the contrary: The biblical vision of the relation between sex, work, and the human person resolves our fragmented cultural understanding of these realities by offering a different perspective from which to examine our own experience.

The writings and life of Edith Stein aptly display this integration of theological truth and practical life. While John Paul provides a robust theological account of these truths, Stein engaged with these questions in her own lived experience while also addressing them rigorously on a philosophical level. Working in the male-dominated field of philosophy before the question of women in the workplace had emerged in the cultural consciousness, Stein wrote several essays

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<sup>14</sup> *Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women*, 7.

exploring issues of work and gender. While her writings typically focus on the female sex and the ethos of feminine work, her insights also expound the relation between work and sexuality in general. In particular, she provides a solid understanding of gender as something that neither negatively affects work (contra gender discrimination) nor remains irrelevant to it (contra gender blindness). By her account, gender is better understood as an inherent personal reality that necessarily shapes one's work.

Not unlike John Paul in his encyclicals and *Theology of the Body*, Stein also uses the Genesis articulation of the woman as a helpmate as the foundation for a robust understanding of sexual complementarity. In her 1932 essay "The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman," she explains what it means for the sexes to work as helpmates:

The Hebrew expression used in this passage is barely translatable – *Eser kenegdo* – which literally means 'a helper as if vis-a-vis to him.' One can think here of a mirror in which man is able to look upon his own nature. The translators who speak of a 'helpmate suitable to him' perceive it in this way. But one can also think of a counterpart, a *pendant*, so that, indeed, they do resemble each other, yet not entirely, but rather that they complement each other as one hand does the other.<sup>15</sup>

As helpmates, woman and man share their fundamental nature as rational and free persons. Yet while sharing this nature, woman remains other and different in a crucial way. Stein's analogy of two hands is helpful: The left and right hands are composed of the same elements (a palm, four fingers, and a thumb) and are thus of equal value to the body as a whole, yet neither could perform much useful work without the other. Both hands must work together to provide full

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<sup>15</sup> Edith Stein, "The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace," in *Essays on Woman*, trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2017), 61.

dexterity and mobility; like two puzzle pieces, their differences correspond to one another. So too with the sexes: While equal in dignity, their differences correspond and complement each other so that they can work together in harmony to accomplish what neither can do as well, if at all, on its own.

The question remains: What does this mean in practical terms, and how can these theological insights be applied in lived experience? Stein argues that in experience the work of men and of women each bears a distinctive ethos or character that derives from the genderedness of subjects.<sup>16</sup> In her essay “The Ethos of Women’s Professions,” the central question is whether indeed there is a “natural feminine vocation of woman.”<sup>17</sup> She focuses on the concept of a specifically feminine soul or consciousness that would “demand” a certain “spiritual attitude” in the activity of work, thus giving it a certain subjective ethos,<sup>18</sup> and she argues that a woman “naturally seeks to embrace that which is *living, personal, and whole*. To cherish, guard, protect, nourish and advance growth is her natural, maternal yearning.”<sup>19</sup> Just as her objective body is oriented to the life-giving act of motherhood and to sustaining other human persons, woman as subject tends naturally to nurture human life in a distinctively maternal way. The central reality of her biological sexuality also manifests itself in other aspects of her experience. Maternity is at the heart of femininity, and although embodied in the act of physical motherhood, it presents itself not so much through particular actions as through an overarching and pervasive attitude. Even in the activity of work – an objective act ordered toward things – woman’s ethos guides her to focus on the intersubjective dimension as she engages with a maternal attentiveness to the persons whom she encounters.

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<sup>16</sup> Stein, “The Ethos of Women’s Professions,” in *Essays on Woman*, 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

But does Stein suggest that women are drawn only to those professions that involve interpersonal, caring, and specifically maternal activities? Does this mean that, by virtue of their gender, women should choose to be only nurses, educators, and mothers, while other more technical or abstract fields like the hard sciences and philosophy should be left to men? Does one's sex definitively rule out certain professions and mean one is better suited for others? Stein argues that the answers to these questions is no:

One could say that in case of need, every normal and healthy woman is able to hold a position. And there is no profession which cannot be practiced by a woman. A self-sacrificing woman can accomplish astounding achievements when it is a question of replacing the breadwinner of fatherless children, of supporting abandoned children or aged parents. But, also, individual gifts and tendencies can lead to the most diversified activities. Indeed, no woman is only *woman*; like a man, each has her individual specialty and talent, and this talent gives her the capability of doing professional work, be it artistic, scientific, technical, etc.<sup>20</sup>

As before, while sex is constitutive of the person, this reality does not overshadow the fact that the sexual and gendered person is ultimately a *person*. Women's work activity bears its own feminine ethos; however, it does so never in a generic feminine or maternal way but always in a way that manifests the personal reality of some individual woman. Although there might be professions or vocations that explicitly appeal to particular feminine qualities, it does not follow that every woman necessarily ought to pursue such paths. For any individual woman, *who she is* is not a function of her womanhood alone but of her unique personality, talents, and training. Her particular feminine traits might suit her for specifically maternal tasks, but they might determine that, as Stein notes, "the professions whose objective requirements are not

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 49.

harmonious with feminine nature, those termed as specifically masculine, could yet be practiced in an authentically feminine way if accepted as part of the concrete human condition.”<sup>21</sup> Here we might imagine that Stein is considering her own experience, namely, how she is pursuing a philosophical profession whose “objective requirements” (tending toward impersonal abstractions and universal claims) are not considered feminine even by her own standard, and yet does so in a way that engages her femininity (through a rigorous study of unexamined questions of female experience). In this way it becomes clear that woman enters the workforce in much in the same way as man: Her sexuality, as a constitutive personal reality, influences her work but does not wholly determine it.

When an individual woman enters a field that is objectively masculine, she presents herself as a helpmate to her fellow workers. Regarding a woman who enters into a seemingly unfeminine profession, Stein claims, “One can even say that the development of the feminine nature can become a blessed counterbalance precisely here where everyone is in danger of becoming mechanized and losing his humanity.”<sup>22</sup> By adding her own unique femininity to a male-dominated field, the woman makes the field more humane, not more womanly or feminine. The same holds true for a man entering a female-dominated field such as teaching or nursing. His masculinity does not detract from or conflict with the ethos of nurturing and fostering personal growth; rather, it adds a new dimension, showing how the a call to foster life – while profoundly evident in the maternal actions of women – is a vocation of every human being and can be lived in an authentically masculine way. By bringing into their work both their individual talents and the ethos particular to their gender, man and woman respond to their original call to serve as mutual helpmates. As masculine and feminine, they correspond to and complement each other’s differences, producing a wholeness and unity

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 50.

that neither sex could manifest on its own. Unlike the shallow and artificial approach of gender blindness, this argument for sexual complementarity reveals the richness and fullness that the genders can bring to professional experience, and in doing so it preserves sexuality as an essential aspect of both the individual human person and humanity as a whole.

### III

Because masculinity and femininity complement each other, it is clear that workplace discrimination on the basis of sex is not only an injustice to individual persons but also harmful to professions themselves. Such discrimination not only deprives professions of individuals with valuable talents and contributions to make, but also prevents them from achieving the dynamic reflection of the human person that comes from sexual complementarity. Where there is sexual discrimination, human work becomes less humane, to the detriment of both workers and the work itself. When males and females work together, on the other hand, they may capitalize on the complementarity of the sexes if they recognize and respond to the original call to be helpmates through their masculinity and femininity. Their work can become truly human. As John Paul II wrote, it “is only through the duality of the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’ that the ‘human’ finds full realization.”<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, these reflections reveal the dangers of a gender-blind approach to issues of sex and work. Far from allowing the individual human person to showcase his or her unique personality, ignoring gender means disregarding an essential aspect of the human being, falsely dismissing sexuality as a secondary or accidental feature. Not only does this result in a fragmented and disintegrated idea of the human person, but it also severs two realities that have been

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<sup>23</sup> *Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women*, 7.

interwoven from the beginning: work and sexuality. As John Paul indicates repeatedly in his appeals to “the beginning” in Genesis, God did not give the call to subdue and rule over the earth to androgynous beings, nor did he give any sort of indication that the call to work was meant to be addressed without reference to a person’s bodily and subjective experience of sex and gender. On the contrary, the call to work is given as part of a larger call: to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth. Man and woman he created them, to be helpmates to each other in responding to their call as human persons. Each of us is called, in his or her sexual identity, to engage in the communion of persons in manifold ways, whether through spousal unity or as helpmates in the activities of work.

Of course, several objections can be raised. After all, the Genesis story reflects the human person at the time of creation, that is, before the introduction of sin and corruption. How are we to understand this prelapsarian ideal under the current reality of sin, especially sexual sin? In the fallen world, sexuality is typically experienced as a reality sullied by temptation and scandal. In the workplace in particular, sexual difference is abused and made the grounds of discrimination. The reality of sexual complementarity is exploited in work environments, as evidenced by the disturbing prevalence of extramarital affairs that germinate in the workplace. The natural call of man and woman to be helpmates can be distorted when coworkers reach a level of intimacy that belongs to spouses.<sup>24</sup> In light of these realities, how are we to call the relationship between sex and work harmonious?

Yet these corruptions should not cause us to deny the truth of sexuality as it was meant to be. Doing so would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. As John Paul writes, these “decisive” truths define man’s “earthly existence, both in the state of original justice *and*

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<sup>24</sup> For statistics on affairs in the workplace, see Rob Moll, “The New Workplace Romance,” available at <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/the-new-workplace-romance/>.

*also after the breaking*, caused by sin, of the Creator's original covenant with creation in man."<sup>25</sup> The truth of the original covenant remains, even after the fall. Workplace affairs do not disprove the natural unity of spouses and their mutual call to be helpmates to one another; rather, they reveal an insidious way in which that call has been corrupted by sin. In such circumstances, the natural complementarity of masculinity and femininity becomes a perversion of spousal unity as persons grow so intimate in their shared work that they begin to seek the sort of unity that is meant to be shared by spouses. The affair cannot be blamed on the work environment – as Stein argues, it is beneficial to human persons and professions alike when men and women work alongside each other, both in order to pursue their individual talents and to contribute their distinctive masculinity and femininity to their work. Rather than faulting sexual complementarity or workplace diversity, the problem of office affairs underscores the reality that we stand in tremendous need of both God's grace and a proper understanding of the nature of our sexuality.

John Paul II and Edith Stein clarify that the theological anthropology in Genesis is an important source for understanding sexuality. It is not portrayed there as something that detracts from or is accidental to one's dignity as a human person. Rather, Genesis reveals sexuality as a constitutive reality of incarnate personhood that makes both the physical and intersubjective relationality of persons possible. To disregard sex in the context of human work is to deny not only something crucial to the activity of work but also something essential to the person who works. Rather than affirming such a false and disintegrated anthropology, we would do well to return to the biblical understanding and to appreciate the significance and indeed great value of sexual difference in the workplace.

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<sup>25</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 5; emphasis my own.

# Technology and Socialism: Different Means to the Same End

*Cullen Hilliker\**

**M**Y GENERATION, GENERATION Z,<sup>1</sup> has grown up with rapidly changing technology that was present with us from the most intimate moments of our childhood. In my own experience, my sleep was monitored by a digital camera; I began memorizing a keyboard at the age of seven; and YouTube is where I first learned how to tie a tie. My naïve 8-year-old self helped my wise 78-year-old grandfather learn how to use his iPod. The age of the microprocessor has reached its fruition. My studies and work in mechanical engineering have shown me that the vocation of the human worker is enhanced by innovation. Technological advancement can aid our exercise of “dominion over the world,”<sup>2</sup> blazing trails in areas such as healthcare, improved living conditions, and more efficient labor. Technology is a great ally, capable of liberating us from material obstacles and limitations.

I have also observed that our drive for innovation is fueled by our exercise of freedom. This freedom, however, is not limitless. It can be denied or compromised, and in such cases the human person is often reduced—through disregard for the immaterial soul—to a material being. When the spiritual aspect of the human person is eliminated, his *telos* is no longer conceived as union with God in heaven. Rather, he exists solely to work and to produce. This distortion of the human

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<sup>1</sup> People born between 1997 and 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Gen 1:26-30.

person gives way to a confusion about means and ends.<sup>3</sup> Technology, which by nature is never anything but a means, can be mistakenly valued as an end in itself. For example, I have noticed in my four years of research in fluid dynamics that the *raison d'être* of science too often is simply to produce more scientific findings, and there is a tendency to crowd out the transcendent dimensions of truth. Scientists are often interested in only the material dimensions of the universe. Sometimes referred to as scientism,<sup>4</sup> this worldview contracts science, the act of observing natural world, and confines truth and knowledge to what can be proved in a lab, discounting entirely those truths that are accessible through religion or philosophy. Another problem I have observed, while working at NASA, is that science is often pursued simply to satisfy human curiosity or to affirm national pride. In general, my experiences have revealed that professional science tends to eliminate the spiritual aspects of work and to reserve no glory for God.

The human person who is reduced to a material being becomes a slave in the sense that he is valued only in terms of his work product. Yet another path to slavery is socialism, which distorts human nature and compromises human freedom.

I am appalled by the growing support among many of my peers, most of them students, for socialism. This totalitarian ideology, which also entails a reduction of the human person to his bodily being, has been responsible for the deaths of roughly 148,000,000 people in the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> It should come as no surprise that a generation

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<sup>3</sup> “End” refers to the *telos* of the human person, that is, a continuing state of perfection after a thing has become fully actualized in its being. It does not mean “termination” but, rather, a state of completion, perfection, and fulfillment. The end of the soul is perfect union with the Creator.

<sup>4</sup> Here “scientism” is understood as the view that science is the only objective means to determine truth. This ideology affirms only natural reason and empirical methodology, and dismisses revelation and divine law as sources of truth.

<sup>5</sup> Rudy Rummel, “Stalin Exceeded Hitler in Monstrous Evil; Mao Beat Out Stalin,” available at

steeped in technocratic culture<sup>6</sup> that has no time for God finds attractive a political system that runs roughshod over human freedom.

Socialism makes sense only if God does not exist, just as technology becomes man's end only if God is not there. My aim in this paper is to call attention to the parallel oppressions that stem from the disordered use of technology and socialist statism. Both the technocrat and the socialist produce the same result: an egregious defamation of the dignity of the human person.

*Natural Law, Divine Law, and the Human Person*

Technology<sup>7</sup> exists to augment our capacities and thereby improve the conditions for human flourishing. It is important to understand the foundational significance of the human person, because when it is misconceived, socialistic and technocratic paradigms can emerge. In order to understand the human person, we must first consider the natural law and divine law. The concept of natural law emerges from the principle that every being has a specific end or function.<sup>8</sup> Through our natural reason we may reflect on those ends and accordingly come to know what is right and wrong.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, natural law ought to be a basis for any civil law, established for rational creatures with the capability of apprehending the natural ends of things. Natural law goes

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20090917001933/http://hawaiireporter.com/story.aspx?1c1d76bb-290c-447b-82dd-e295ff0d3d59>.

<sup>6</sup> "Technocrat" is defined here as one who prioritizes his work product (especially, the development of technology) and has no regard for his transcendent end.

<sup>7</sup> Technology is not science (which is the attempt at understanding the nature of the world). "Technology" here is defined as the application of innovative tools and their impact on culture.

<sup>8</sup> The natural end of a knife is to cut, for example.

<sup>9</sup> The idea that murder is wrong is a conclusion of natural law because all animals naturally desire the preservation of their own lives and the propagation of their species.

only so far, however. It does not entail a view of man's transcendent end or eternal life. It is the divine law, revealed by God and taught by the Church, that supplements the natural perspective and provides the necessary instruction for achieving one's eternal happiness. Divine law promotes and perfects human freedom.<sup>10</sup> Man cannot be the arbiter of good and evil, because if he were, he would claim authority to determine what truth is, "to the point that truth itself would be considered a creation of freedom."<sup>11</sup> Divine law allows for human freedom because "the reason which promulgates it is proper to human nature."<sup>12</sup> Natural law and divine law cannot be dismissed as they are necessary to liberate the human person, allowing for a harmonious binding of freedom and nature.<sup>13</sup>

The human person, who is a composite of material body and immaterial soul, has both reason and will. He wills or chooses certain goods that are first presented by reason. His action is said to be "right" only if he acts freely and not under compulsion. Moreover, freedom enables the human person to reach his *telos*, eternal life with the Creator. In the process of attaining this end, the person must develop both spiritually and materially—spiritually by means of faith, and materially by means of reason—so that, like a bird with two wings, he can ascend to the contemplation of truth.<sup>14</sup>

Material development is necessary for the flourishing of the human body. Man exercises his reason and sense faculties, through the application of work and technology, to attain material goods to which he is naturally inclined. These goods are necessary but not sufficient for the fulfillment of the human person. Hence, the need for man's spiritual dimension, which enables him to ascend toward truth. The spiritual aspect of the human person, manifested in the soul, resembles

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<sup>10</sup> *Veritatis splendor*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>14</sup> *Fides et ratio*, 1.

God, “for God is spirit and the human person proceeds from Him in having as principle of life a spiritual soul capable of knowing, loving, and of being uplifted by grace to participation in the very life of God.”<sup>15</sup> Together the spiritual and bodily aspects the human person enable man to conform to the natural law and the divine law. The freedom to develop both body and soul must be honored if the human person is to attain his proper end.

In his spiritual dimension, the human person resembles his Creator. But to disregard this part of human nature is to fail to grasp the full reality of creation, and in turn the fullness of God as Creator. One who thus misses the Truth runs the risk of falling victim to the snares of relativism and arbitrariness, and will quite likely set up something to fill the void where God is absent. Often God is replaced by human tools—ironically, tools that should have helped us to find God.

*The Dignity of Work and the Role of Technology:  
To Uphold the Human Person*

Every man must work, and from this work he will receive his daily bread.<sup>16</sup> The command “Subdue the earth” was given by the Creator to the first man.<sup>17</sup> Since the Fall, humans have been condemned to earn our daily bread by the sweat of our brows.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, toil is an unavoidable aspect of our existence, and technology has been developed in response to this reality. Technology exists to enhance our ability to subdue the earth, so that we can cultivate and transform its products to serve our needs. It is a good, an ally, so to speak, that

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<sup>15</sup> Jacques Maritain, “Individuality and Personality,” in *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947), 5.

<sup>16</sup> Gen 3:17-19, Prov 10:22, Ex 1:8-14, Jer 22:13, Lk 11:3.

<sup>17</sup> Gen 1:26.

<sup>18</sup> Gen 3:19.

improves our efficiency at work, increasing both the quantity and the quality of our products. It stretches our horizons by developing, enhancing, and perfecting human work, helping us to attain our end. Importantly, notwithstanding the many successful developments of technology, “the proper subject of work continues to be man.”<sup>19</sup> Man is superior to his inventions and should have authority over them. Work supplies our natural bodily needs, and technology assists us in our work. So it is clear that technology is but a means. It is not and cannot ever be the end for man.

The problem with technology manifests when the tool is taken as an end in itself and when human freedom is used to pursue intermediate ends that are not well ordered or conducive to man’s ultimate end. For example, Russell Hittinger has remarked on how “the policy of mutual assured destruction supplants diplomacy; the contraceptive pill supplants chastity; the cinema supplants recreation, especially prayer.”<sup>20</sup> When this happens, divine law is ignored, natural law is abused, and consequentially human freedom is distorted. Technology is no longer valued as a tool and becomes a “manifestation of absolute freedom, the freedom that seeks to prescind from the limits inherent in things.”<sup>21</sup> In this technological dystopia of “absolute freedom,” man establishes a new set of rules that serve his own narrow desires. These self-serving, relativistic rules no longer order man to his ultimate end but instead serve the false idol of technological innovation. While technology itself is not necessarily bad, this distorted approach to it is harmful because ultimately man is ordered to his Creator, not his creation. To reject God is to create a void that is

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<sup>19</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Russell Hittinger, “Christopher Dawson on Technology and the Demise of Liberalism,” available at <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/christopher-dawson-on-technology-and-the-demise-of-liberalism.html>.

<sup>21</sup> *Caritas in veritate*, 70.

impossible to fill. On this point Christopher Dawson, reflecting on his first visit to New York, remarks:

The ancient Egyptians built pyramids that were even greater than the skyscrapers of New York, in terms of human effort expended, but they were for the tombs of God-Kings. The relatively poverty-stricken peoples of medieval Europe erected vast cathedrals and abbeys, but these were the expression of their common faith and their hopes for eternity. But today we build temples greater than the Egyptian pyramids or the Gothic Cathedrals and they are dedicated to toothpaste or chewing gum or anything that anyone wants.<sup>22</sup>

The rug of religion has been pulled out from under society and replaced with technology. And when the primary goal of living becomes efficiency and innovation, rather than spiritual and bodily fulfillment, man reverts to corrupt state, and a technocratic culture takes hold. It becomes apparent, as Hittinger observes, that such a culture is no longer dependent on God. He writes,

Today, across all of the different political cultures, technology is required for the state's administration, for its military security, its propaganda, its markets, indeed for its very legitimacy. Governments rise and fall on the basis of their success in supplying the population with the technological means to achieve temporal happiness.<sup>23</sup>

Such a society can address "how" questions, but what happens when someone asks "why." This is where technology becomes oppressive.

"How" explanations cannot substitute for "why" answers because religion and revelation, which supply the "why," can never be reduced

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<sup>22</sup> Christopher Dawson, "America and the Secularization of Modern Culture," Smith Lecture presented at the University of St. Thomas in Houston (January 1, 1960).

<sup>23</sup> Hittinger, "Christopher Dawson on Technology."

*Technology and Socialism*

to a system of equations or algorithms. Furthermore, the human person cannot be understood in mechanistic terms. Dawson remarks, “[T]he fact is that a technological civilization which is devoted to purely secular and material ends inevitably tends to reduce man to an automation by subjecting him to the dominion of vast impersonal forces.”<sup>24</sup> The development of humans and society is thus never a purely technical matter achievable through the methods of engineering. This technocratic cycle never goes anywhere, for it “is increasing all the time in scale and power but there is no final purpose which justifies this fast expenditure of energy.”<sup>25</sup> The man who has replaced God with technology becomes its slave. Technology is not a religion, an ideology, or an institution; however, the technocrat will try to make it all of these and lose control of it in the process. By reducing the human person to a body and replacing man’s spiritual end with a technological one, “the Western Man is like Frankenstein who created a mechanical monster which he became unable to control so that it came to threaten his life.”<sup>26</sup> If man wants emancipation, he must submit himself to the Principle that is superior to personal gain and maximum power.

*Socialism and the Human Person*

The socialist movement presupposes a materialist reduction of the human person. It seeks to eliminate private property in favor of state-owned assets. The problem with this system is that the freedom of the human person is suppressed. Those who would implement a socialist system are “emphatically unjust, for they rob the lawful possessor, distort the functions of the state, and create utter confusion in the

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<sup>24</sup> Dawson, “America,” 25.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

community.”<sup>27</sup> This system “is unnatural: a heresy against nature,”<sup>28</sup> as the “abolition of private property attacks this core reality about man and creation, and puts in its place a fictional account of man in relation to the goods of the earth, in which romantic dreams are encouraged and base passions stirred up.”<sup>29</sup> The working man loses his freedom to create greater security for himself by living sparingly and investing in what he knows he possesses. The socialist proposal to take private possessions and place them in service of the broader community “strikes at the interests of every wage-earner, since [it] would deprive him of the liberty of disposing of his wages, and thereby of all hope and possibility of increasing his resources and of bettering his condition in life.”<sup>30</sup> Socialism exploits the dignity of the worker by removing his freedom and inhibiting his potential to better the condition of his body and soul.

The fundamental error of socialism, as Pope St. John Paul II points out, is anthropological in nature.<sup>31</sup> Socialism reduces the human person and values him only insofar as he contributes to the material success of a greater political mechanism. The pope explains,

Socialism 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.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Rerum novarum*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Catherine Ruth Pakaluk, “Socialism and Capitalism in Catholic Social Thought” in *Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays*, ed. Gerard V. Bradley and E. Christian Brugger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> *Rerum novarum*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

The reduction of the human person means a denial of his freedom, and under socialism man becomes a slave of the state.

*The Socialist's End Foreshadows the End for the Technocrat*

The technocrat and the socialist alike have a disordered understanding of the human person. These misconceptions give way to a paradigm that reduces the human person by alienating the soul from the body, ordering man to his creations and not to his Creator. The technocratic action assumes “the violent (or forced, or tyrannical) application of science – or a scientific ‘mechanism of human design’ – for practical ends which are contrary to faith and reason, since together these enlighten our understanding of what is properly natural.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the socialist has “no special relations between any persons or groups of persons, the community of goods implies the atomization of individuals – typically achieved, always imperfectly, through coercive mechanisms of the state that may be aptly called technocratic.”<sup>34</sup> This strikingly similar dismissal of the human person must be observed, for one foreshadows the other.

To make this point more explicit, consider two previously cited passages. First, in a socialist state, as John Paul II explains, “[m]an 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.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in regard to technology Dawson remarks, “[A] technological civilization which is devoted to purely secular and material ends inevitably tends to reduce man to an automation by subjecting him to the dominion of

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<sup>33</sup> Pakaluk, “Socialism and Capitalism,” 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 13.

vast impersonal forces.”<sup>36</sup> The oppressive impact of socialism clearly resembles the disordered use of technology.

Furthermore, consider this statement of Dawson’s: “[M]an has to conform more rigidly to a pattern of behavior imposed on him by impersonal mechanical forces.”<sup>37</sup> Out of context, one may wonder whether this refers to a socialist society or a technocratic one, or both. The “impersonal mechanical forces” could be those of a totalitarian state or the those of technology that control culture. As it happens, Dawson is referring to the latter. He continues:

[O]ur modern technological society has become so highly organized that it absorbs almost the whole life of the individual and controls his activities and even his thoughts. It is becoming almost impossible for the individual to stand out against the mass pressure which makes for conformity . . . for it is in the very nature of the technological order that there is no room for independent centers of action: everything has to be geared to one all-embracing system.<sup>38</sup>

Technological improvement holds incredible potential for human development, and it lies presently in the hands of Generation Z. Technological advancement grasps nature and has a certain power to control it. Similarly, socialism grasps human nature and has a certain power to control it as well. It is evident that the founders of socialism saw that technological improvement promoted social improvement, paving the way for the illusion that science alone can direct human beings to their ultimate end. Socialism has blazed a destructive path at the expense of the human person. Similarly, technology is equally capable of doing great harm to the human person and claiming man as its slave.

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<sup>36</sup> Dawson, “America,” 25.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.



# A Good Death and Healthcare at the End of Life

*JohnPaul Stedwill\**

SINCE THE 1950S the average life expectancy in the United States has increased from sixty-eight to seventy-nine, and it has more than doubled from an average of only thirty-five in the 1800s.<sup>1</sup> Naturally this prompts the question of how much further the health sciences can progress in terms of lengthening human lifespans, but it also creates an undue emphasis on extending life, as opposed to realistically confronting the inevitability of death. These statistics demonstrate the progress that has been made in medicine, technology, and living standards, but these advancements have also given current and future generations a certain sense of “control” over life. With the demand for end-of-life care at a historical high, our society is in a position to reflect on two competing priorities: fueling further scientific research to prolong life, and helping persons to die in a natural manner with their whole being in mind.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper I will show that there is such a thing as a good death, and I will elaborate on what it requires. In addressing this issue I will first examine what makes human persons unique among creatures. From there I will analyze death and develop the idea that there is a way

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Mather, Linda Jacobsen, and Kelvin Pollard, “Aging in the United States” *Population Reference Bureau* 70, no. 2 (December 2015): 2-20.

<sup>2</sup> For more, see Leon Kass, *Life, Liberty and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2004), chap. 12. Kass offers compelling arguments against the unmeasured prolongation of life based on social consequences, natural limitations on life span, and a deeper longing for immortal life.

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of approaching it that allows one to appreciate more authentically one's life and in turn to prepare well for death. Finally, I will suggest how the healthcare system may improve the type of care it provides, which I believe could have deep ramifications for a person's entire lived experience leading up to death and may even transform common views of death and dying.

*Dignity at the End of Life*

To discuss a "good death," it is first necessary to reflect on what a "good life" includes. Here "good life" should be understood not to mean the subjective balance of pleasures and suffering that a person experiences, but something deeper. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, life is affirmed as good precisely as part of God's creation. As Genesis 1:31 reads, "God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good." Man's goodness comes with his creation. Again, Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion . . . over all the earth.'" In the order of creation man receives a unique honor, authority, and role that is expressed by the Latin word *dignitas*.<sup>3</sup> The specific difference of mankind, rationality, is essential to human dignity and our elevated rank, value, and excellence beyond any other being in the created order.<sup>4</sup>

Scripture thus establishes that humans have an exalted status, giving them natural rights and lifting them above all nonrational creatures. Furthermore, this dignity is intrinsic to their nature and so cannot be degraded or lost.<sup>5</sup> Yet, just as one can live a life that falls short

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Kass, "Human Dignity and Bioethics," in *PCBE: Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics* (March 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, *Biomedicine and Beatitude: An Introduction to Catholic Bioethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 45. Austriaco's argument for the intrinsic nature of human

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of the goodness for which he has been created, so too can a certain sense of dignity be diminished during life, especially in certain approaches to dying. This second sense of dignity, which will be referred to as personal dignity, incorporates other external elements of humans as acting agents. Personal dignity can be affected by the individual agent's actions or through the actions of others directed toward the individual.

*Humans in Community*

To introduce the role of a community within a phenomenological structure, I will examine the role of social relationships in self-fulfillment presented by St. John Paul II by briefly summarizing some major ideas in his work *Person and Community*. Following the Thomistic tradition, John Paul II describes the human person as a being who possesses a rational nature due to having a noncorporeal soul that bestows the gifts of reason and freedom, which are exercised in human action.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, the human person is a dynamism of objective being and subjective consciousness. John Paul II goes on to say that we are intellectual-sensory, spiritual-material composites, which gives us a unique depth of understanding in the physical world as well as access to a spiritual reality.<sup>7</sup>

To identify the essential mark of the human person and the source of human dignity, John Paul II turns to our creative, experiential, and reflexive nature, which accounts for the fact that human experience is

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dignity is founded on the nature of mankind itself. He says, “[T]o affirm that human beings have intrinsic dignity is to claim that they are worthwhile because of the kind of things they are.” Constitutive of human identity itself, dignity is always present in an absolute sense in humans, and all other elements of creation are devoid of this dignity in an absolute sense.

<sup>6</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 168.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

unlike that of any other creature.<sup>8</sup> The pope further confirms and clarifies the status of human dignity by asserting that divine revelation and the Incarnation of Christ have elevated each person's encounter with creation.<sup>9</sup> Each person, endowed with human dignity, is a unique individual, never subsumed under the collective understanding of the species.

Through relationships the person acts as an I who achieves self-possession and self-determination. Consciousness alone does not constitute an I until it is disclosed through action on the part of the will. Self-possession means more than just shaping ideas in one's consciousness; indeed, it means one is able to act freely to determine the self and one's own personhood. The I is discoverable to self and others through the experience of action. Every interaction with the other is a specific instance of one I sharing and receiving from another I that does not contribute to a universal or abstracted concept of community but a personal encounter with another's humanity as a neighbor, in John Paul II's terms.<sup>10</sup> This relationship is deeper than trivial human encounters; it requires the participation of both persons in which the I of each is the most disclosed it can ever be to another. Conversely, the neglect of I–thou relationships gives rise to alienation – a separation from community resulting in isolation – the person does not realize another's I, and community cannot be formed.<sup>11</sup>

With John Paul II's basic framework of participation and alienation now expressed, the relation between existence and activity in the human person can be better understood. He explains that each person

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 179. John Paul II says, "God also 'becomes a human being;' God enters into the drama of human existence through the redemption and permeates the human being with divine grace. For those of us who are believers, this is where the dignity of the human person finds its fullest confirmation."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 206.

is a dynamic human subject, in both a metaphysical and a practical sense, as a combination of all those actions personally performed as well as received from others.<sup>12</sup> Action is the primary mode by which human subjectivity can be examined. While some actions have an elevated status, such as conscious reflection, all are directed toward human development and reveal each person's unique subjectivity. Conscious human action plays a key role in that it allows for self-determination and discloses one's personhood through efficacious activity. To an even greater degree, this type of action reveals the person and gives self-possession and self-governance that in turn can lead to self-fulfillment. While ontological human dignity is intrinsic to each person, self-fulfillment is the direct result of human actions. Here consciousness, activity, and self-fulfillment intersect. As the pope says, "In fulfilling an action, I fulfill myself in it if the action is 'good,' which means in accord with my conscience."<sup>13</sup> Fulfillment is not found *in* the completion of the action itself, but more properly *through* the completion of a morally good action where the person himself becomes morally good. Thus, conscious action, which is necessarily free and intentional, sets off a series of consequences: from self-possession to self-determinism and self-governance, to self-fulfillment and ultimately spiritual transcendence. Yet, in order to experience self-fulfillment, a person's actions must be directed to moral goods.

A community of individuals acting in I–thou and I–we relationships is meant to facilitate and encourage the self-fulfillment of every person.<sup>14</sup> This role of community speaks not only to its value but also to the intrinsic social nature of human beings. Community leads people to relationships with a reflexive element insofar as when an individual's I is given to a thou, it comes back to the I, creating a deeper experience and verification of self.<sup>15</sup> Authentic participation in an I–

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 242.

thou relationship discloses the self to another and back to oneself, expressing the mutual responsibility of persons while also facilitating the social dimension of communities, signified by we. For example, when a patient explains his needs to a caregiver, who listens and then responds to his request, both are affirmed in their personhood by the mutual concern and love that they demonstrate. They share a responsibility to respond with love to the other because that is the only proper response to the natural goodness of each human person.

When participation fails, alienation ensues, which at its core is a type of dehumanization that entails disregarding persons in their involvement with community. Alienation both threatens the personal subject and fails to honor the whole truth of the human person.<sup>16</sup> Community alienation is clearly an issue in current discussions concerning so-called patient autonomy. In the medical field patient autonomy is proposed as an important standard related to human dignity. The connection between autonomy and dignity is important for thinking through the morality of many issues in healthcare, so I will examine it here before turning to the question of what type of care is best for dying patients.

#### *Investigating the Role of Autonomy*

I will now look at the connection between two different concepts of autonomy and their relation to human dignity, both personal and ontological, at the end of life. This topic is relevant because autonomy plays an important role in many end-of-life decisions. This discussion will also show how one can avoid alienation and be a part of a community while not completely sacrificing personal autonomy.

To begin, a simple definition of autonomy is “self-governance.” Others in the field of medical ethics use more expansive definitions, such as:

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 255.

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. . . self-rule that is free from both controlling interference by others and from limitations, such as inadequate understanding, that prevent meaningful choice. The autonomous individual acts freely in accordance with a self-chosen plan, analogous to the way an independent government manages its territories and sets its policies. A person of diminished autonomy, by contrast, is in some respect controlled by others or incapable of deliberating or acting on the basis of his or her desires and plans.<sup>17</sup>

Those who use this sort of definition, which I will call the modern concept of autonomy, make two things abundantly clear. First, autonomy means the individual is the sole agent making decisions about his or her life; second, to infringe on the authority of the individual is to compromise his or her freedom. Isolation and self-alienation are serious concerns in this framework. One may also note the potential for conflict to arise if a patient's autonomous decisions violate the natural law and his own ontological dignity.<sup>18</sup> In such a situation, the autonomous individual effectively becomes the arbiter of what is morally right and wrong for himself. In John Paul II's words, "[f]reedom would thus lay claim to a *moral autonomy* which would actually amount to an *absolute sovereignty*."<sup>19</sup>

I will now lay out what I believe to be an alternative understanding of autonomy that can resolve such tensions between autonomy and dignity while maintaining due respect for freedom and the natural law. Here I will primarily draw from John Paul II's approach to self-determinism through action and its connection to dignity. The pope's thought is relevant to the discussion of the modern concept of

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<sup>17</sup> Jukka Varelius, "The Value of Autonomy in Medical Ethics," *Medical Ethics, Healthcare, and Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (October 2006): 377–88.

<sup>18</sup> A clear example of this type of conflict would be a patient wishing to end his own life. Refusing to honor this request is in tension with the modern concept of autonomy, but not refusing means violating the natural law. Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide will be discussed below.

<sup>19</sup> *Veritatis splendor*, 35.

autonomy because he explicitly describes the link between human action, self-determination, and fulfillment. He recognizes the importance of a different sense of autonomy, namely, one that affirms the human person as free in his own self-determination. He writes in his work *Love and Responsibility*,

On the part of God . . . by giving man an intelligent and free nature, he has thereby ordained that each man alone will decide for himself the ends of his activity, and not be a blind tool of someone else's ends. . . . God allows man to learn His supernatural ends, but the decision to strive towards an end, the choice of course, is left to man's free will.<sup>20</sup>

Man has a certain right to make decisions because he is a rational being and has been given freedom to choose between good and evil. Furthermore, the pope is clear that no individual should ever be manipulated or coerced into a decision; doing so is an illegitimate violation of a person's freedom.<sup>21</sup>

I propose that there is a deeper understanding of autonomy in John Paul II's thought. It is not one of absolute sovereignty but is, rather, grounded in a person's freedom for self-determination based on his rational nature, which reveals and is directed to the achievement of his supernatural end. This concept of autonomy will be referred to as the alternative view of autonomy.

From a Christian perspective, the final end of each person – eternal union with God in heaven – is important for defining the alternative concept of autonomy and understanding the proper use of human freedom. While other senses of autonomy offer no guidance or constraints with respect to what actions a person should be free to

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<sup>20</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 27.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. John Paul II describes any action taken against another person in an effort to “use” that person as intrinsically evil insofar as it objectifies the person.

take, the alternative view begins with an understanding of the ultimate end, from which it becomes clear that certain actions should be chosen and others avoided. When we link autonomy and the final end, we also open up discussion about the connection between autonomy and human dignity. As mentioned above, ontological human dignity derives from our rational nature. Human dignity reflects the fact that each person has a free will for self-determination that should be directed toward what is morally good. Autonomy as presented in the alternative view means the exercise of free will by an agent who thereby determine who he is.<sup>22</sup> Under the alternative concept of autonomy one is thus free to express one's human dignity, both ontological and personal. A person's autonomous actions honor his ontological and personal dignity and are a form of self-determination.

In the discussions of autonomy vis-à-vis end-of-life care, euthanasia is a common topic. Euthanasia, which ironically means "good death," is defined as "an action or an omission which of itself or by intention causes death, in order that all suffering may in this way be eliminated."<sup>23</sup> For many who subscribe to the modern sense of autonomy, a dualist view of human nature that prioritizes the soul at the expense of the body lends support to the decision of suffering patients to take their own lives. And yet, affirming the legitimacy of euthanasia has serious consequences for society in general and for the medical profession in particular. Because the taking of one's own life violates the natural good of life itself, doing so is an abuse of the gift of freedom, which is meant to order humans to their supernatural end. While the modern sense of autonomy is presented as a freeing reality that gives patients supreme control over their lives, the autonomous choice of euthanasia is actually the antithesis of human freedom: Instead of opening up new options for living, it closes the person off

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<sup>22</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (Boston: D. Riedel Publishing, 1997), 152.

<sup>23</sup> Austriaco, *Biomedicine and Beatitude*, 146.

from all further decision-making and self-fulfillment.<sup>24</sup> The argument for euthanasia as a compassionate option for suffering patients betrays a misunderstanding of ontological human dignity. But even within the bounds of its own logic, modern autonomy does not justify euthanasia.

### *A Good Death*

Death is a natural part of life, and the first step toward a good death is living a good life. John Paul II's philosophical arguments for living well are based on the idea that one obtains fulfillment through actions that are in accord with the common good. He emphasizes the human person as an acting person made for community, which is not only where personal fulfillment is found but also where transcendent spiritual reality is revealed.<sup>25</sup> A person's actions alone are insufficient to affirm his identity and move him toward fulfillment; community is always essential. Especially as a person approaches death, the community plays an integral role as it accompanies him through the final phase of his life. The ongoing development of relationships and social connections as one approaches death is a continuation of the process of personal human progress that assists the dying person in achieving his final end. Community does not change the fact that each person will die his own death, but it does provide grounds for continued engagement of the person as a subject up until death.

A good death, considered as the last phase of a good life, does seem possible as it means continuing to move toward fulfillment and transcendence.<sup>26</sup> Death is a unique phenomenon in human life in part because it is the end of lived experience in a body – the only lived

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<sup>24</sup> Kass, *Life, Liberty and the Defense of Dignity*, 251.

<sup>25</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 233.

<sup>26</sup> In this context, I do not mean for a good death to be perceived as one that is simply free from pain and suffering. Instead, I mean to engage in deeper philosophical reflection that acknowledges what is fitting to humans as beings with intrinsic dignity.

experience any of us has known – but it is also a moment that in some sense encapsulates how one has lived all along. Knowing that we are going to die gives us time to examine our lives and an opportunity for conversion. For the person who lives in such a way that his self-determining actions reveal him to be a being destined for a supernatural end, there is not only the potential for a good death but also a calm anticipation of that moment.<sup>27</sup> Thus, a good death is possible as it is a continued type of “movement” toward a person’s supernatural end; moreover, there is a structure, which is community, that we as humans are naturally made for and that helps individuals who are in the process of dying to move toward that supernatural end.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This Christian understanding of death as a movement toward a supernatural end depends on the habit of hope. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “[H]ope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men’s activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven.” And: “[E]ach one of us should hope, with the grace of God, to persevere ‘to the end’ and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God’s eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1818 and 1821.

<sup>28</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 234-36. Regarding the fulfillment of oneself through action, John Paul II repeatedly refers to personal transcendence, which is ordered toward a supernatural end. He describes transcendence as a basic quality of being human, and he writes, “Without this transcendence – without going out beyond myself and somehow rising above myself in the direction of truth and in the direction of a good willed and chosen in the light of truth – I as a person, I as a personal subject, in a sense am not myself.” The subjective fulfillment of self and the transcendence of self are connected by the fact that actions informed by the light of truth result not only in morally good actions but also in becoming good as a human being. The term John Paul II uses to describe this process where transcendence of truth and goodness actually form one’s being is “autoteleology,” which also reveals our own contingency as human beings and our constant need to move away from evil and toward the good.

I would also argue that people who do not believe that humans are made for a supernatural end can still experience a good death in one sense. For example, there is goodness in physical and emotional closure, as well as the fulfillment of knowing one has lived a meaningful life on earth. As far as actions having meaning in this life, even in a transient way, a dying patient can feel a sense of fulfillment in seeing the fruits of his or her life. However, I would also argue that because we are made for a supernatural end, to deny or fail to recognize that end diminishes the degree to which one can experience a good death. Following these reflections, I wish now to examine how the healthcare system can support the holistic care of dying patients and what structures are already in place to serve this end.

#### *Community-Based Healthcare Support*

Thinking through issues related to care for the dying is a good opportunity for integrating philosophical reflection and scientific data. Here I wish to examine what exactly is useful in a healthcare setting for facilitating a good death. First and foremost, the ontological dignity of patients must be respected, as well as their personal dignity. This will require a community of persons in which each individual has the opportunity to participate in relationships ordered toward good ends, including dying well. This community should also be a natural extension of the larger community from which patients and their families come, so the goods sought and medical practices employed align with their already established moral values.

Ontological dignity cannot be taken away from a person or even diminished by degree, yet it can be dishonored or unrecognized. Such a failure alienates the patient. John Paul II emphasizes the importance of recognizing the dignity of others by caring for them when he writes, “[T]he commandment of love is simply the call to experience another human being as another I, the call to participate in another’s

humanity.”<sup>29</sup> Thus loving care for a patient affirms the ontological dignity of the human person and has the reciprocal benefit of affirming the humanity of caregivers as well.

Personal dignity is multifaceted, and what it takes to honor it will vary from patient to patient. Social roles, certain important activities, and autonomy in the alternative sense are a few of the things that support personal dignity. Social roles are important for personal dignity because as the body deteriorates a person may need help to transition mentally or psychologically so that their subjective personhood comes to terms with the new reality of their bodily limitations.<sup>30</sup> Social roles can help to maintain an embodied view of the self, for those who maintain social roles interact with others in concrete ways that reaffirm their identity as an I who is capable of giving and receiving from others their humanity.

Action is an integral part of the human person, not just as a sign of life but also as an outward manifestation of the subject. A person in declining health should be helped both to recognize his diminished physical capabilities and to continue to use his body to express his identity.<sup>31</sup> In regard to the importance of bodily action John Paul II says that “human beings, while existing and acting together with others, that is, in various systems of interpersonal and social relations, are able to be themselves and to fulfill themselves.”<sup>32</sup>

Autonomy in the alternative sense contributes to personal dignity when patients are allowed to make decisions about simple daily things including eating habits, what clothes they wear, and when they will have visitors. A community structure is important for honoring

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>30</sup> Andrea Rodriguez-Prat and Xavier Escribano, “A Philosophical View on the Experience of Dignity and Autonomy through the Phenomenology of Illness,” *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of Medicine* 44, no. 3 (2019): 285.

<sup>31</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 223.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 238.

patients' autonomy in these ways, while also providing opportunities for social interaction so patients stay actively engaged in relationships.

I propose that modern hospice care is a community-based structure that achieves many of these good ends. Hospice care is a multifaceted approach that addresses patient care, family needs, and caregiver resources. Hospice focuses on developing an individualized plan for each patient, as each person, family, and situation is different. The goal is for patients to live their remaining lives to the fullest. One of the important features of hospice care from a practical and philosophical standpoint is that in 98 percent of cases patients remain in their current homes,<sup>33</sup> which preserves their community and offers continuity for transitioning to a good death.

Owing to its financial, social, and health-related benefits, hospice care in the United States has grown in popularity since it was first introduced in the 1970s. In 2016 alone, 1.43 million people were enrolled in hospice care.<sup>34</sup> Its potential to cut financial costs by up to 40 percent by eliminating expensive hospital stays at the end of life has also made it an attractive option, as demonstrated by increasing legislative support for Medicare hospice coverage over the past several decades.<sup>35</sup>

Hospice as the normal standard of care for terminally ill and elderly patients would have several positive impacts.<sup>36</sup> For one, more patients could enter care earlier than the last few days of their lives. The median length of hospice care is only twenty-four days, which gives patients

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<sup>33</sup> "Hospice Care: Updated for 2020," available at <https://www.aginginplace.org/hospice-care/>.

<sup>34</sup> "Hospice Care Overview for Professionals," available at <https://www.nhpc.org/about-nhpc>.

<sup>35</sup> "The Health Economics of Palliative Care," available at <https://www.cancernetwork.com/view/study-supports-using-mrd-as-a-stratification-variable-for-patients-with-tnbc>.

<sup>36</sup> The current Medicare standard allows patients to be placed on hospice care when they have a prognosis of less than six months to live.

just over three weeks to adjust to the situation.<sup>37</sup> As discussed above, patients who wish to die well should make efforts to live well and already be in a position to enter that final phase of life. However, for patients who have not already lived in ways conducive to a good death, the time in hospice care provides a unique opportunity of “intensified” support to help redirect them through counseling to address deeper psychological, emotional, or spiritual concerns and thereby promote closure.

Not only may hospice care assist patients as they navigate the end of their lives and seek to die well; it also has the potential to bring cultural transformation in the United States regarding the elderly and death. For decades, the reality of death has been steadily removed from the public eye as patients have been isolated in hospitals and nursing homes. Growing unfamiliarity with the final stages of life has given rise to more and more uncertainty and fear of death. In the twentieth century the number of persons dying outside the home steadily increased: from 49.5 percent in 1949, to 60.9 percent in 1958, and 74 percent in 1980.<sup>38</sup> These figures demonstrate the shift that has occurred as multigenerational families that used to live under the same roof or in the same geographic area have grown increasingly dispersed. More and more, the elderly no longer live in family homes where they can approach death with loved ones around them, despite the fact that polls have shown that nine out of ten dying patients would prefer to receive end-of-life care at home.<sup>39</sup>

The thought of John Paul II is especially relevant here: A person’s identity is affirmed through the I–thou relationship, which also makes each person in the relationship responsible to the other, and so removing the elderly and the dying from their homes makes it more difficult for them to experience a good death. This represents a grave

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<sup>37</sup> “Hospice Care: Updated for 2020.”

<sup>38</sup> Marilyn J. Field and Christine K. Cassel, *Approaching Death: Improving Care at the End of Life* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1997), 39.

<sup>39</sup> “Attitudes Toward Dying and Death.”

failure on the part of those in relationship with them. For many, their own home is crucial for providing a sense of comfort and freedom from the fear of undue and impersonal medical interventions that would hinder their peaceful acceptance of death.

Given the overwhelming trend of the elderly and the dying no longer remaining in their family homes, American culture has lost contact with the reality of death and the human experience of accompanying those who are dying. I believe that hospice care presents a viable solution for “reclaiming” the experience of death. Hospice provides an opportunity for strengthening the relationships of patients and their families and friends, while restoring the personal benefits of community for affirming self-identity and finding fulfillment. Humans naturally need community, and so we should try at all costs to avoid alienating persons at the end of life and make every effort to embrace them as valuable members of society. It is a lie that the dying and infirm are worthless because they are not “productive” or “contributing” members of society. As John Paul II taught, any such suggestion is false: The value of a person is intrinsic and not measured externally in terms of one’s usefulness.<sup>40</sup> Hospice care can be one important means for embracing those who are dying and for reaffirming that they are integral members of society who in their own distinctive ways contribute value to the entire community.

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<sup>40</sup> Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 27.

# A Call for Contact with the Poor and Marginalized

*Katheryn Furlong\**

**T**HE CATHOLIC CHURCH calls people to use their wealth to support the common good, and personal experience with those in need can empower people to live out this call. The Church's teaching on the universal destination of goods affirms that it is appropriate for people to have private property, but also that they ought to put their property to use in serving others. In the *Summa theologiae* St. Thomas Aquinas explains, "Man should not consider his material possessions as his own, but as common to all, so as to share them without hesitation when others are in need."<sup>1</sup> The poor and marginalized are especially among those in need, and working for the common good requires a concern for them.<sup>2</sup> Jesus Christ lived out this preferential option for the poor through relationships and authentic encounters with those on the margins of society. While there are numerous ways to be in relationship with the poor and marginalized, and there are surely human needs that are not monetary in nature, this paper focuses specifically on the impact of relationships on financial donations. An authentic human relationship gives rise to a new form of solidarity through which both parties give and receive.

Effective aid requires understanding the nature of the need at hand and putting resources to use appropriately. Personal experience with

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<sup>1</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 66, a. 2, quoted in *Rerum novarum*, 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, 26. Pope Paul VI writes that the common good is "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment."

the poor increases one's understanding of their needs through a more direct knowledge of their circumstances. Personal encounters with those on the margins serve as a reminder of humanity's interconnectedness and can foster a greater commitment to charitable giving. Such a commitment to meeting the needs of the poor and marginalized is both a greater response to the Church's call to allocate private possessions for the common good and an acknowledgement of the duty we all have to be responsible to one another.

Personal contact is particularly relevant in today's world as digital platforms make direct interaction less a part of daily life. In *Laudato si'* Pope Francis discusses how the so-called technocratic paradigm shifts the way people relate to themselves and the world.<sup>3</sup> This shift is not inherently bad, for digital technologies can be used to serve people well in tangible ways. In the context of charitable giving, for example, internet platforms can share impactful stories that move donors to give in the first place. They can facilitate donations almost instantaneously and across the globe. The power of digital technology must not be overlooked. However, digital technology has its downsides. The internet can lead people to fall out of touch with both themselves and each other, resulting in token demonstrations of support rather than personal engagement and a genuine desire to aid the poor and marginalized. It may become easier to withhold charitable donations because the needs of others feel less pressing from a distance. Personal contact with the poor can counteract the negative effects of the digital age by replacing disconnect with relationship and passivity with action.

*The Role of Personal Experience in Understanding  
the Circumstances of the Poor*

Personal experience refers to a perceptible connection that characterizes a human relationship. These encounters feel close and

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<sup>3</sup> *Laudato si'*, 106.

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even intimate, rather than distant and removed. A personal experience means one grasps more than an objective reading of facts and figures about a demographic or particular population; it involves the subjective experience of another's humanity that facts and figures simply cannot convey. Personal experience is palpable, evoking emotion and empathy.

Personal experience can occur in a variety of ways. The most tangible and vivid personal experiences often come through relationships. Being in relationship allows someone a unique and intimate experience of another person. It often involves knowing a person through a variety of experiences and coming in contact with him or her repeatedly. The more contact there is, the more likely potential exists for relational depth. The deeper a relationship is, the more opportunity there is for ties of connection, empathy, and even love to grow.

People can also have personal experiences with those they know only digitally. Videos, stories, and personal testimonies can express a person's lived experience in ways that resonate. Even without encountering the subjects of such narratives face-to-face, one can still appreciate their situations by learning about where they come from and where they have been. Stories can offer a new perspective, challenge people to think differently, and motivate them to take action much like direct relationships. Stories are powerful media with the ability to reveal the unique challenges of the poor, but not all types of stories offer the same sort of insights into the daily lives of individuals.

Stories on the individual level have a greater impact than abstract generalizations. A report on the impact of storytelling by the Rockefeller Foundation relays that "the closer to the ground you get, the better."<sup>4</sup> The ground is the realm of lived experience. The ground is where people navigate their unique circumstances and solve their

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<sup>4</sup> Jay Geneske, "Digital Storytelling for Social Impact," available at [https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/blog/digital-storytelling-social-impact/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1589983275.6950590610504150390625](https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/blog/digital-storytelling-social-impact/?doing_wp_cron=1589983275.6950590610504150390625).

personal problems. Getting closer to the ground is beneficial because it better represents the actual, lived, human experience. A story close to the ground may focus on the life of an individual or the circumstances of a specific and relatively small group. As we depart from the ground, we tend to become more abstract and often unrealistic in our thinking about others.

Abstract discussions about the poor and marginalized, while useful in certain contexts, can fail to account for the individualized needs and experiences of people. As a result, they can lead to blanket statements and generalizations that are unhelpful when it comes to directing aid. Examples include statements about the poor in general or about all persons experiencing homelessness. Such generalized statements treat groups of individuals as homogenous entities, and decisions based on such generalities are less effective at providing effective individualized aid. For example, while financial donations may be appropriate in certain cases, emotional or social support may be what is even more needed in others. Speaking of the poor in general terms reduces a heterogenous population to a homogenous class of individuals, all with the same supposed needs. Yet real people do not have abstract needs; as individual persons, each of us has a unique set of needs that most likely differ from the needs of those around us.

To be effective, aid must meet the unique needs of an individual and be based on what F. A. Hayek calls “the knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place.”<sup>5</sup> Otherwise known as the “local knowledge problem,” this idea highlights the importance of the knowledge of those closest to any situation. For Hayek, the local knowledge problem helps explain the limits of central planning or decision-making from a distance. The further from a particular issue the decision-maker is, the less knowledge he or she has of the intricacies relevant to the situation at hand. This insight is relevant in

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<sup>5</sup> F. A. Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society,” *The American Economic Review* 35, no. 4 (1945): 521.

the case of financial donors insofar as it encourages both a sense of humility – one ought to realize that important facts are missing if one does not have a local perspective – and in turn a desire to create personal connections that foster local knowledge.

The importance of local knowledge is apparent in everyday life, often in the context of our relationships with close family and friends. Imagine a student, Sally, who struggles in school and wants to improve her grades. Does she need a tutor, a quieter study space, or a lighter extracurricular load? Not every student needs the same things to succeed, and someone close to Sally who has the local knowledge of her personality, study habits, and weaknesses is better equipped to offer advice or help than someone without such knowledge. Effective aid gives the student what she needs, neither depriving her of what is required for success nor offering her what is unuseful. Similarly, effective aid for the poor and marginalized provides for their distinctive needs, which only knowledge of their unique circumstances brings to light.

Personal experience also helps to remove barriers to charitable giving that are based on misconceptions of the poor. One revealing study found that people with high moral identity – that is, a propensity to value and think often about moral traits “such as fairness and generosity as well as goals and behaviors of helping others” – are less likely to donate money when they believe the recipient is responsible for his or her situation.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, it reported that “the actual responsibility of the recipient for their plight is not as important in a donor’s decision as the donor’s *perception* of the recipient’s responsibility.”<sup>7</sup> Stereotypes of poor and marginalized populations abound, especially in the absence of personal experience that challenges them. When stereotypes incorrectly fault marginalized

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<sup>6</sup> Saerom Lee, Karen Page Winterich, and William T. Ross, “I’m Moral, but I Won’t Help You: The Distinct Roles of Empathy and Justice in Donations,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 41, no. 3 (2014): 6, 18-19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

populations for their predicaments, potential donors may withhold aid. But personal experience helps to clear the fog of stereotypes and other generalizations.

While personal experience with the poor and marginalized can help to break down stereotypes, some may argue that such experience can actually end up reinforcing stereotypes. For example, imagine a man has a conversation with a woman experiencing homelessness, only to discover that she has a gambling addiction. The man concludes that gambling has made her personally responsible for her homelessness, and he may even extrapolate from her case and make more general conclusions regarding all homeless persons. In this way it is possible that personal contact reinforces certain beliefs and makes people less inclined to donate to charities that help the poor and marginalized. In such situations, however, sample size is important to consider. By definition, a stereotype generalizes and does not accurately represent all those to whom it is applied. Specific interactions create and perpetuate stereotypes when people forget this simple fact about stereotypes, which themselves never reveal the whole story.

Furthermore, in some cases the whole story may reveal that financial donations are not the best response. Discernment is key. Money is certainly important in the lives of individuals, just as it is essential for organizations to operate and for society at large to function. Even so, it is not the only need. Emotional support, friendships, and opportunities for personal growth and development are among them myriad other needs of human beings. The donor trying to decide where to put his or her money does well to get close to individuals' stories, which may reveal the specific and most effective ways of offering support.

Another downside to personal experience may be that getting personal requires getting involved, and not everyone is in a position to get involved. It may be easier to operate from a distance if one does not have adequate time or resources. With the power to make a difference comes the responsibility to act accordingly, and an

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individual may not feel up to the task. People may feel that even with local knowledge they are too uninformed of the larger picture to make good decisions, notwithstanding their desire to do good. And so it is clear that personal experience does not guarantee positive outcomes.

We should also consider that a person's actions do not exist in a vacuum, and unintended consequences are always a possibility. A well-wishing donor may desire to do the most good possible but does not want to take on a larger commitment than he or she is capable of fulfilling. Personal experience with the poor and marginalized is not a perfect solution that safeguards against unintended consequences, but it does offer a valuable perspective that can better equip individuals to make informed decisions by humanizing both donors and recipients. Personal contact brings another's unique story to the forefront in a way that can catalyze further action when the temptation to do nothing at all may exist.

*The Relevance of a Call for Contact in the Digital Age*

A call for contact with the poor is particularly relevant in the modern digital world, as technology infiltrates daily life. Digital technologies – from cell phones to laptops to the internet that connects it all – have immense power, and whether or not this power promotes the common good depends on how people use it. Professor of history and technology Melvin Kranzberg developed a series of “truisms” about the intersection of technology and society, the first of which is that “technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.”<sup>8</sup> To write that technology is never neutral suggests it always does either good or harm. Kranzberg's first law highlights the importance of understanding both the positive and negative potential of technology in the context of charitable giving.

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<sup>8</sup> Melvin Kranzberg, “Technology and History: ‘Kranzberg's Laws,’” *Technology and Culture* 27, no. 3 (1986): 544-45.

Technology can help to facilitate activism and charitable giving in numerous ways. People can use Google to find charities focused on just about anything they can imagine and donate money to them in a matter of minutes. Employees can scan a QR code from a flyer on the work bulletin board and learn about volunteer opportunities at a homeless shelter downtown. Friends can text one another a link to sponsor a child's education, and they can even set up monthly autopayments so they don't need to remember to contribute again later. Technology makes it simpler, faster, and more convenient to donate, sign up to volunteer, and learn about causes that one cares about. Yet while these benefits must not be overlooked, there are also challenges associated with technology that can inhibit charitable giving.

We operate today in a world inundated with abundant access to all kinds of information, which has its downsides. Economist Herbert Simon writes, "[A] wealth of information creates a poverty of attention, and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it."<sup>9</sup> The seemingly endless flow of information is increasingly difficult to filter, and we find it hard to keep what is important and let the rest fall away. It therefore becomes incumbent upon us to be intentional in the way we use technology to facilitate action.

Pope Francis articulates a similar message in *Laudato si'*, where he discusses the technocratic paradigm and how "science and technology are not neutral."<sup>10</sup> If not grounded in a moral framework, technology can be used for unchecked pursuit of profit at the expense of the poor.<sup>11</sup> Fortunately, escape from the technocratic paradigm is possible. This happens, the pope writes, "when technology is directed primarily to resolving people's concrete problems, truly helping them live with more dignity and less suffering."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Simon, "Designing Organizations," 40-41.

<sup>10</sup> *Laudato si'*, 114.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

Without an intentional commitment to concrete, material action, internet users can easily fall into the rut of what may be called “passive activism.” The phrase may seem like a contradiction, but this tension highlights an important irony. Whereas “activism” suggests direct action leading to some tangible result, “passive activism” means a person may have some sentiment or inclination in favor of change but does not take any practical steps to effect that change. The term “slacktivism” also colorfully captures this phenomenon. It has been defined as “a willingness to perform a relatively costless, token display of support for a social cause, with an accompanying lack of willingness to devote significant effort to enact meaningful change.”<sup>13</sup> “Token support” involves small acts that demonstrate support for a cause in a way that requires little effort, such as sharing a post on social media.<sup>14</sup> “Meaningful support,” on the other hand, involves actions requiring “significant cost, effort, or behavior change in ways that make *tangible contributions* to the cause,” such as “donating money and volunteering time and skills.”<sup>15</sup> Researchers have found that potential donors are less likely to make material contributions after public displays of token support because their small actions have satisfied their desire to make a favorable impression on others.<sup>16</sup> Though it can be tempting to neglect financial giving when one is able to offer support in passive and nonmaterial ways, it is important to remember that living out the Church’s teaching on the universal destination of goods specifically requires material action. Picking up the “task of making [property]

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<sup>13</sup> Kirk Kristofferson, Katherine White, and John Peloza, “The Nature of Slacktivism: How the Social Observability of an Initial Act of Token Support Affects Subsequent Prosocial Action,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 40, no. 6 (2014): 1149.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1149-50.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1150.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1162.

fruitful and communicating its benefits to others” requires far more than passive activism.<sup>17</sup>

Direct contact with the poor and marginalized can help one to filter out the noise of an information-rich world and remember the importance of personal action. A personal encounter with someone experiencing homelessness, or a mother living below the poverty line, or a child without funding for her education makes the real human needs of these people tangible. Such a palpable encounter both paves the way for using technology for good and steers one away from the cop-outs of passive activism, complacency, and ignorance.

This call for personal contact is for individuals and organizations alike. At the individual level, technology can be a powerful tool for educating oneself and getting involved. People can sign up to volunteer at their local shelter, pledge to sponsor a child’s education, and look for opportunities to build relationships within their communities. Furthermore, charitable organizations can use technology to personalize their outreach through stories, testimonies, and fostering a personal connection between donors and recipients. They can leverage the natural human disposition for relationships by making targeted requests for support, giving donors a more direct link to the recipients of their generosity.

Material change requires material action, and the potential for technology to support relationships and personal connections of donors and those in need is vast. Yet users need to be creative in order to avoid the pitfalls of the technocratic paradigm. One strategy is to emphasize personal experiences with the poor and marginalized, which can draw attention to their needs and inspire potential donors to make use of technology to take direct, material action.

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<sup>17</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2404.

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*Conclusion*

The Catholic Church teaches that private property is destined for common use. One way people can live out this teaching is by providing financial support to individuals who are poor and marginalized. Personal experience with the poor and marginalized can promote charitable giving by encouraging more donations and directing them to more effective uses. Personal experience can encourage donations by breaking down barriers that would prevent potential donors from giving in the first place, such as stereotyping the poor as directly responsible for their own poverty and thus undeserving of aid. Personal experience can also increase the effectiveness of charitable gifts by targeting donations to meet specific individual needs based on local knowledge.

Direct contact with the poor is especially important in the modern digital age because it motivates the use of technology to facilitate material change, when an otherwise overwhelming influx of information encourages mere token support and dulls personal convictions regarding the necessity of taking action. At the heart of this call for contact is an emphasis on the human person and the obligation to serve people well. It is an invitation to recognize our shared humanity and thereby seek to improve the lives of others more effectively.



# The “How” of Catholic Poverty Alleviation: A Philosophical and Practical Analysis

*Avery West\**

**W**HAT ONE BELIEVES about the good life determines how one helps the poor. A philosophy grounded in a Catholic understanding of the human person influences not only the end toward which aid organizations work, but also how they go about achieving those ends. John Paul II and Wilhelm Röpke point out that work and reciprocal relationships are central to the human being and, therefore, central to the good life. These essential features of human experience should be affirmed in all the operations of poverty programs, thereby acknowledging that individuals are most human when they give of themselves in friendship and work.

The largest Catholic group working toward poverty-alleviation in the U.S. is the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), which funds various relief efforts around the country. While the groups the CCHD supports all state that they affirm human dignity as a core value, they do not always effectively enable individuals to realize their personal capacities for friendship and work.

In this paper I will first outline some principles for the good life as understood by John Paul II and Wilhelm Röpke, and then use that

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standard to understand better the potential benefit and harm caused by various CCHD-funded programs.

*John Paul II on Work*

For John Paul II, work is an indispensable component of the good life. Not only does a job provide the means for an individual to support himself and his family, but also work itself is inherently dignified. God himself worked in creation and instructed man to take care of the prelapsarian garden, revealing that work is far more than mindless toil. John Paul writes that “through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes ‘more a human being.’”<sup>1</sup>

Beliefs about what makes a man poor and what makes a good life will influence how one goes about helping the poor. A distorted philosophy of work, then, can have a great impact on the practical measures individuals take to serve the less fortunate.

John Paul II focuses attention on a modern philosophical threat that he calls economism. “The error of economism,” he writes, considers “human labor solely according to its economic purpose.”<sup>2</sup> He points out that many people in business subscribed to this materialist reduction of the human being during the rapid industrialization around the turn of the century. When work is understood only as a means to an end, workers are understood as means as well. The value of human beings as workers is quantified in terms of production. In turn, workers are taken to be units that can be fired at will, traded for an equivalent production quantity, and employed for long and grueling hours in order to maximize efficiency. Organizations that advocate for the rights of workers, who see work as a good for the human person and value more than just the output

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<sup>1</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

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numbers, are an essential counterbalance to such distortions that may arise in a capitalist economy.

What does economism have to do with helping the poor? Perhaps unknowingly, many well-intentioned nonprofit organizations adopt an economic conception of work—viewing work only in terms of its material value. When church or community groups repeatedly give the same low-income individuals the material fruits of work (money, food, shelter), they implicitly undermine the inherent value of work. Over time, nonemergency handouts send recipients the message either that they are unable to contribute meaningfully to the world through their labor, or that their work is simply less important. According to John Paul II, however, work provides real value and enriches a person's soul, not just to his or her bank account. Catholic organizations should have a robust understanding of the dignity of work so they can pass that on to the people they serve.

Leaders in both business and charity organizations can be prone to falling into the trap of economism. There is a tendency to deny or at least overlook the inherent personal and spiritual value of work. A philosophy of the human person that emphasizes the importance of work as essential for the good life serves as an important corrective in this regard.

*Röpke on Relationship*

Twentieth-century economist Wilhelm Röpke also provides some valuable insights about human nature that should inform how we go about meeting the needs of the poor. He explains that subsidiarity is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a means that makes possible relationships, which themselves are essential to man's nature. "Community, fraternity, charity—they are all possible only in the small, easily comprehended circles that are the original patterns of human

society,” Röpke writes.<sup>3</sup> Economic freedom and decentralization are important components to the good life, but relationships and family are at its center.

Röpke also insists that these community ties and the common ethic on which they are built are neither a happy side effect nor a separate aspect of a well-lived life. Community and morality are the very foundation of a good society and economy.<sup>4</sup> He does not, however, argue that this ethic should be externally imposed. Rather, “the nidus of the malady from which our civilization suffers lies in the individual soul and is only to be overcome within the individual soul.”<sup>5</sup> Röpke’s emphasis on the individual and local community are connected—only in long-term relationships can one really be well formed. Moral transformation occurs on an individual level, through relationships. “Self-discipline, a sense of justice, honesty, fairness, chivalry, moderation, public spirit, respect for human dignity, [and] firm ethical norms” are necessary for a strong society and economy, Röpke says, and “family, church, genuine communities, and tradition are their sources.”<sup>6</sup> While morality can occur only in the individual soul, relationships are essential for forming that soul and creating an environment in which a good soul can grow and flourish.

Drawing together the perspectives of John Paul II and Röpke, one can say that an individual can work and meaningfully take part in society only when he has been morally formed, and only communities and relationships foster morality. For Catholics serving the poor, Röpke’s insights into the connection between the individual and community have important consequences. Poverty programs must be implemented at the local level not only because subsidiarity yields the

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<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Röpke, “The Economic Necessity of Freedom,” *Modern Age* (Summer 1959): 234.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Röpke, *A Humane Economy: The Social Framework of the Free Market* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), 125.

most efficient results but, more importantly, because it also creates space for relationships. Relationships open the door for community, moral formation, and work. Catholics who desire to help low-income individuals, then, should implement programs that cultivate relationships, both between volunteers and clients and among the clients themselves.

The Second Vatican Council constitution *Gaudium et spes* explains that relationships are not one-sided. Rather, they demand the self-gift of each individual involved. Furthermore, “man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”<sup>7</sup> Relationships with and among the poor are no different. Everyone has something to give, and reciprocity is essential for affirming the dignity of each individual person.

One might argue that the purpose of material programs such as food banks is simply different from that of those programs serving the more intangible needs of relationship and work-readiness, and that each form of charity should stay within its own scope. However, one must make a distinction between the need to be met and the person to be served. Even if a particular program focuses on food insecurity, those running it ought always to keep in mind that they are working with human beings who are complex and have integrated needs. One can feed the poor in a way that either affirms or disregards their humanity.

For instance, many food pantries operate under a very bureaucratic, impersonal system. Clients enter the building, fill out a form, wait silently in a room with other clients, and leave as soon as they are handed their box of food. However, other groups like Urban Recipe have found a way to meet the same need while still affirming the humanity of their clients. Urban Recipe operates as a co-op: About fifty low-income families meet biweekly, and each member helps in

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<sup>7</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, 24.

some way. Some retrieve donated food from local grocery stores; others unload the delivery truck; others sort and distribute goods. After the food is organized and boxed, elected officers from among the co-op membership conduct a business meeting that includes community announcements, devotional time, and sometimes a guest speaker. At the end of the day, each member walks away with a box of food, but the way he got that box is arguably more important to his humanity than are its contents. At Urban Recipe, members have the satisfaction of using their hands to provide for their families as well as the joy of sitting around a table with friends. They experience the value of work and reciprocal relationships in the process of having their material needs met. Urban Recipe is a fine example of how charities should affirm human dignity not only by what they do but also by the way that they do it.

John Paul II and Wilhelm Röpke have made clear that work, relationships, and reciprocity are essential to the good life for all people, regardless of income level. Those seeking to implement Catholic social teaching in their programs do well to keep these human components in mind.

#### *Practical Application*

In order to combat the threat to dignity that poverty presents, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) started Poverty USA, an “initiative of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development . . . created as an educational resource to help individuals and communities to address poverty in America by confronting the root causes of economic injustice—and promoting policies that help to break the cycle of poverty.”<sup>8</sup> The CCHD funds regional groups that actualize this mission. Let us take a look at the some of the CCHD-funded nonprofits in the state of Maryland (as a representative

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.povertyusa.org/>.

sampling), as they attempt to address poverty at both the spiritual and material levels. In this section I will analyze to what extent they implement John Paul II and Röpke's vision of work, relationships, and reciprocity.

Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) is a compelling example of how to affirm human dignity and enable people to live a good life. This group has conversations with thousands of community members and works with existing organizations and institutions to host weekly employment classes, invest in entrepreneurs, and assist families with financial planning.<sup>9</sup> Not only does BUILD meet explicit needs for jobs and housing; it also calls members of the community to self-gift by themselves partaking in the projects and forming relationships by taking classes. It also works in preexisting institutions, thereby honoring the relational bonds and local knowledge that have already been established in the community.

United Workers, also based in Baltimore, has high goals to honor human dignity but seems lacking in its execution. This group works in the political arena to promote workers' rights, affordable housing, and their main project: fair development. For United Workers, fair development means improving environmental, cultural, social, and economic well-being for all people. Other than demanding greater community participation in development decision-making, however, United Workers seems to spend minimal time with the populations they are trying to help. While it is true that some of their issues can be addressed only by government, this group does not actualize well the principle of subsidiarity. Their website laments 40,000 vacant residences in Baltimore and calls for the most centralized-planning sort of solution, citing housing as a human right for which the government must provide.<sup>10</sup> A group with similar aims and a better understanding of human nature might organize neighbors into groups who can

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<sup>9</sup> "Signature Campaigns," available at <https://www.buildiaf.org/about-build/#>.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.unitedworkers.org/housing\\_is\\_a\\_human\\_right](http://www.unitedworkers.org/housing_is_a_human_right).

renovate old homes, with each individual using his gifts to bring about the common goal. This approach would build relationships, foster a sense of neighborhood “ownership,” and affirm the dignity of work.

With a similar advocacy bent, the No Boundaries Coalition employs methods that are more community-led, rather than merely community-supported. They promote voter registration, organize discussions among policemen and residents, train students to lead community projects, and encourage shop owners to stock healthier foods.<sup>11</sup> By investing in police/resident relationships and young leaders, the No Boundaries Coalition’s model follows Röpke’s idea of changing the community through the individual soul, and vice versa. The group’s nascent pop-up produce market may prove a worthy opportunity for affirming human creativity and work as well.

The Immigration Outreach Service Center (IOSC) provides immigrants and their children with referrals, tutoring, and ongoing support. As opposed to the other CCHD-funded groups, this center is run out of a local parish. Pope Leo XIII, whose teaching is a major source for Catholic social thought, wrote against those who “would substitute in [the Church’s] stead a system of relief organized by the State. But no human expedients will ever make up for the devotedness and self sacrifice of Christian charity. Charity, as a virtue, pertains to the Church.”<sup>12</sup> Operating as the Church, this group can already give more love and meet more spiritual needs than any “human expedient.” While it does direct immigrants to government services, IOSC maintains contact with its clients and helps them navigate different struggles over time. This relational model is essential not only for learning the deeper needs of each individual but also for treating each as a human person. IOSC also creates an environment in which people can give of themselves. Their website explains, “We provide opportunities for immigrants to come together to learn and grow, to

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<sup>11</sup> <https://noboundariescoalition.com/what-we-do/>.

<sup>12</sup> *Rerum novarum*, 30.

organize, and to share information with one another.”<sup>13</sup> In this way, IOSC calls the people they serve into reciprocal relationships.

BRIDGE Maryland’s mission statement claims that it “uses intentional relationship building, organizing and intensive leadership development in order to strengthen congregations and faith leaders to demonstrate and advance justice in the world.”<sup>14</sup> This group trains pastors in mobilizing their congregations to vote and advocate for political causes. It actualizes subsidiarity by operating within natural social circles and informing community leaders through personal conversations and relationships. However, there is one way in which the organization’s methods undermine its goals. BRIDGE Maryland’s website states, “We have broadened our diversity, including Muslim and Jewish members and allies who share our vision.” While it is possible to work toward a common goal with people of different faiths, a truly Catholic vision of charity must always see the person as first and foremost someone who needs to experience directly Christ’s love. Serving people in a way that best affirms their humanity means working through vehicles that encourage personal relationship with Christ—something non-Christian groups do not contribute to or otherwise support. Leo XIII warns against losing sight of our fundamentally Christian outlook and placing too much hope in human prudence alone:

And since religion alone, as We said in the beginning, can remove the evil, root and branch, let all reflect upon this: First and foremost Christian morals must be reestablished, without which even the weapons of prudence, which are considered especially effective, will be of no avail, to secure well-being.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ioscbaltimore.org/about-iosc/>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://bridgemd.org/>.

<sup>15</sup> *Rerum novarum*, 82.

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Those who work with the poor should always strive to protect souls, working against poverty precisely because it threatens the dignity God placed in the soul. They do best, moreover, when they recognize that the soul’s deepest need of salvation is met only through Christ.

*Conclusion*

The CCHD funds a wide variety of causes throughout the country. It seems, though, that an unfortunate number of its sponsored groups focus solely on political problems and government solutions. While institutions and systems are undoubtedly an important aspect of poverty alleviation, the Catholic understanding of the human person as relational and self-giving calls for a different approach to poverty. Organizations that prioritize political change do not seem to affirm any power in their clients other than the capacity to vote. But pushing the problems of poverty up to higher and higher levels of government authority suggests that it is no longer individual Christians and the Church who are to “share food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless,” or “give clothes to those who need them,” as the prophet advises in Isaiah 58:7. When the power and efficiency of politics are viewed as what’s most needed, Christians abdicate their responsibility to be friends to the poor. A Catholic anthropology calls for friendship, a reciprocal relationship in which each gives of himself to the other.

It is fair to say that the USCCB funds some wonderful groups providing important services, but it is worth considering how many organizations’ goals could be accomplished in ways that better affirm human dignity, through greater attentiveness to the personal significance of work, relationships, and reciprocity.

# A Defense of Religious Liberty and Tocqueville's Integrated Society

*Rachel Teti\**

**I**N RECENT YEARS many Catholic traditionalists have become increasingly disillusioned with classical liberalism and its minimalist view of the state's role as protector of life, liberty, and property. Troubled by challenges present in the modern secular state, many young American Catholics find themselves drawn to the idea of an integrated church–state union in which the latter is subordinate to and enforces the laws of the Catholic Church, demonstrating proper submission of the temporal realm to the spiritual. Against this movement of so-called Catholic integralism, my essay will defend religious liberty and the separation of church and state, offering the model of Alexis de Tocqueville's religious America as an alternate and more truly integral vision of human political and religious life.

One tenet of integralism is the idea that the state and the Catholic Church ought to be united as body and soul are.<sup>1</sup> I would argue, however, that this idea is metaphysically incoherent in light of Church teaching. For one, the Church has reaffirmed time and again the right of nations to exist independently of each other, yet under this body–soul analogy, the one Church as soul would require only one body, and so only one nation. Furthermore, nations are natural, not supernatural, institutions. Constitution-framing is not a sacrament, and there is no mystical unity of political bodies as there is among the dioceses of the Catholic Church. Integralism would seem to require that there be

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Pink, "Integralism, Political Philosophy, and the State," *Public Discourse* (May 9, 2020), available at [www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/05/63226/](http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/05/63226/).

either a single worldwide state or only one “valid” Catholic state that excludes the rest of the world. The former would be in tension with the principle of subsidiarity, one of the pillars of Catholic social teaching – the idea that decisions ought to be made on the local level whenever possible, and that more centralized authorities should be appealed to only when lower-level authorities are not competent to complete the task at hand. The latter, the idea of a separate Catholic state, is also problematic in light of the Church’s universality and Christ’s command to “make disciples of all nations.”

The metaphysical tension between the authority of the Church and the authority of the state gives rise to questions with no easy answers, questions that will not be resolved until Christ the universal King returns to claim his throne and rule in perfect justice, at which point political states will no longer be necessary. States arise naturally out of the need to order human life in justice for the common good in a world dominated by concupiscence. As James Madison writes in *Federalist* 51, “[i]f men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.”<sup>2</sup> The Catholic Church is divinely protected from error in faith and morals, but it is made up of men who are just as prone to sin and error as anyone and have no natural claim to civic authority. Given these realities, regimes that respect religious liberty, while imperfect, are the best practical option.

Contrary to some modern interpretations, the argument for religious liberty need not entail a denial of objective truth or the assertion of some relativistic right to define the meaning of one’s existence. Rather, religious liberty is justifiable as something that protects the Church’s mission to save souls while affirming the limits of state authority. In his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, John Locke argues that the state should not involve itself in the business of eternal

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<sup>2</sup> James Madison, *Federalist* No. 51, in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Penguin Group, 1961), 319.

salvation because salvation requires true faith, which is never the product of coercion.<sup>3</sup> The Church agrees, affirming that “the principle of religious freedom makes no small contribution to the creation of an environment in which men can without hindrance be invited to the Christian faith, embrace it of their own free will, and profess it effectively in their whole manner of life.”<sup>4</sup> This does not mean that the state has no role in promoting the good of souls through citizens’ education in virtue. Rather, the virtues the state rightly teaches are simply natural virtues, derived from the natural law and not any particular revelatory tradition.

It is also a mistake to interpret the separation of church and state as absolute. It is true that many today argue as much, but this is a perversion of the original principle. The absence of a state-sanctioned religion in no way means that religious people must ignore the principles of their own religion when they are operating in the political sphere. If a Catholic wants to argue for a law, such as a ban on abortion, on the basis of his Catholic faith, he ought to be free to do so. If a group of likeminded people succeeds in persuading a sufficient number of fellow citizens that such a law promotes the common good, it may be enacted through the democratic process.

Some integralists argue that political communities always instill moral convictions in citizens, and so the establishment of a state religion can be useful and perhaps even necessary for leading people to their salvation.<sup>5</sup> And yet the establishment of a state-sanctioned religion will teach citizens nothing unless there are also certain laws, including some concerning religious content, as well as a willingness to enforce them. Here we are at an important crossroads: Either such laws must be applied to all citizens, regardless of their particular

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<sup>3</sup> John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1698), trans. William Popple, available at [socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/locke/toleration.pdf](http://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/locke/toleration.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> *Dignitatis humanae*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Pink, “Integralism.”

religious beliefs, thereby violating the rights of conscience of some; or we must create two sets of laws, one for the baptized and one the unbaptized. Clearly both options are untenable: The former means violating the rights of conscience of some, while the latter fails to respect the principle of equality before the law and effectively means creating two separate states. Either option is contrary to justice, the very foundation of law.

We may also observe that using the state's power to enforce laws deriving from revealed tradition tends not to promote the life of the Church but to corrupt it. In his *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville argues that when any church aligns itself with the state, "it sacrifices the future with the present in mind. . . . [I]t must adopt maxims that are applicable only to certain peoples . . . and loses the hope of reigning over all."<sup>6</sup> According to Tocqueville, a religion tied to the temporal realm becomes subject to temporal claims. In the case of modern European states that eliminated the establishment of religion, Christianity was rejected as part of the older political regime. Tocqueville was likely thinking of his native France and its rejection of the Catholic Church during the revolution. In the United States, by contrast, Tocqueville saw that religious liberty made it possible for Christianity to have far greater cultural influence. American priests, for example, typically stayed out of politics and thereby reserved the Church its own separate domain of authority, where it would not get caught up in the ever-changing dynamics of civic life. Indeed, Tocqueville notes that while religious authorities are never directly operative in government affairs, religion is "the first of [the American] political institutions."<sup>7</sup>

One may argue that separation from the state is not ideal for the Church, but history seems to demonstrate that it is a practical concession worth making. If liberalism may be criticized for devolving

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<sup>6</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, "Of Religion Considered as a Political Institution," *Democracy in America* (1835), trans. James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 483.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

to modernism, then the integrated regimes of medieval and Renaissance Europe may be criticized for devolving to schism, corruption, and violent revolution. The corruption and domination of state powers over bishops, including the bishop of Rome, during the Renaissance is well known, and it was famously owing to political interests that German princes supported Lutheranism and Henry VIII broke from the Church. In prerevolutionary France, clerical involvement in the regime led to anathematization and systematic oppression during the revolution. Tocqueville explains: “Unbelievers in Europe pursue Christians as political enemies, rather than as religious adversaries; they hate faith as the opinion of a party much more than as a mistaken belief; and in the priest they reject the representative of God less than the friend of power.”<sup>8</sup> Personal corruption is not the only problem here, for a virtuous bishop involved in politics will be hated by his political enemies as much as a corrupt one. The problem lies in a church’s becoming, and thereby being reduced to, another political entity. When a church becomes an ally of a certain political class or group, it is susceptible to being used by some as a tool for political purposes and opposed by others for the same reason – based not on any judgment of truth but on political reasoning. When a church plays power politics, it becomes subject to the rule of power. It is naive to believe that church power can effectively subordinate and rule state power; there will always be conflicting interests, and a church under the state is far worse and is corrupted more than one separate from the state.

Beyond these practical matters, integralism fails to adequately address its own philosophical concerns. The tension between church and state is treated as a question of jurisdiction, wherein the Catholic Church has the exclusive claim to truth and the state is reduced to an entity that exercises force to promote material well-being. But this characterization is incompatible with the model of a human life that

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

unites body and soul, the temporal and the eternal. While integralists criticize secularism for compartmentalizing these elements of human life, what they propose is not a truly integrated life but an imposition, a dominance of reason by the will. In their vision, the two do not work in harmony; rather, all truths are handed down from on high as something to be obeyed rather than believed. Submission in this sense is not much different from the simple relativistic rejection of truth outright. To bind together the authority of the Church and the authority of the state is to demand that the Church rule by decree in areas that ought to be reserved for the exercise of prudence.

Tocqueville's analysis of the American republic offers a more truly integral framework for the relationship between church and state. Firstly, it is worth noting that the American founders, though as a group not associated with any particular sect, are not silent on the matter of religion. The rights upon which the founding rests are derived from nature's God,<sup>9</sup> consistent with a kind of Christianity that is neither distinctively Catholic nor antithetical to Catholicism. The American founders maintained that the law itself rests on an acknowledgement of the equal human dignity of all persons that comes from God. They held that no man has a natural right to rule, and God alone is to be worshipped. Law is neither based on nor enacted to encourage a radical individualism whereby every man rules himself according to his own whims; rather, the state recognizes its own authority as coming from God as well as the God-given freedom of the individual person to have some degree of self-rule. Thus the principles of the American founding are compatible with an order under which the state is properly subordinate to God as the source of all earthly authority.

In Tocqueville's account, Christianity pervades all facets of American society, including and especially the political domain. America thus demonstrates well how the Christian religion and liberty

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<sup>9</sup> *The Declaration of Independence* (1776).

can be intertwined. Though the Christian churches in America were not ostensibly political, Tocqueville comments that religion still “directs its mores, and it is by regulating the family that it works to regulate the State,” such that “the American draws from his home the love of order that he then carries into the affairs of the State.”<sup>10</sup> The constitutional separation of church and state is the condition for a greater political influence of Christianity insofar as it may establish the bounds of morality that are guardrails in a political world that is otherwise seemingly incapable of constraining itself. In Tocqueville’s America, “the human mind never sees a limitless field before it. . . . [A]t the same time that the law allows the American people to do everything, religion prevents them from conceiving of everything and forbids them to dare everything.”<sup>11</sup> The guidance that religion supplies for republican liberty, according to Tocqueville, inspires apostolic missions, careful attention to religious duty, and good laws. Christianity so permeates the culture that even the unbeliever is guided by its morals and upholds its influence: “[C]onsidering religious beliefs from a human aspect, he recognizes their dominion over mores, their influence over laws . . . so he regrets faith after losing it, and deprived of a good of which he knows the whole value, he is afraid to take it away from those who still possess it.”<sup>12</sup> In such a culture, political and religious life coalesce. The picture Tocqueville paints of America is one of a well-integrated people, guided by their Christian faith and exercising their liberty for its proper ends.

The reason why this dominion of Christianity in America could happen in the first place was the constitutional separation of church and state, but Tocqueville’s understanding of this separation is different from the modern secular view. By his account, the laity in America are free in all sorts of ways to exercise their religious beliefs in public life; it is only clerics whose religious life is to be kept explicitly

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<sup>10</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 473-74.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 474-75.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

separate from the state. The two authorities, clerical and secular, remain separate even while the lay citizen integrates religion into every facet of his life, including the political. And so Christianity does not undermine its authority by tying itself to particular political concerns or parties; it is safeguarded as a higher law.<sup>13</sup>

Catholic integralism calls for a political order that allows for the Catholic faith to be lived fully. This is a noble goal, but one based on both an overly simplistic understanding of the church–state relationship as well as the error of “supernaturalizing” the natural institution of the state. Religious liberty in the American tradition is a better way of resolving the tension between the two authorities. Religious liberty does not prohibit Catholics from living their faith in the political sphere; rather, for both church and state it is protection against undermining their genuine authority, which is something that has happened far too often in history. Tocqueville’s alternate vision of the relationship between Christianity and the state shows how religious liberty makes it possible for Christianity to act as a powerful moral force in the lives of those people for whom liberty and religion are fully integrated.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 480-81, 483.

# Religious Education and Establishment Clause Jurisprudence

*Nicholas Marr\**

**I**N JUNE 2020 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that religious schools cannot be excluded from generally available funding programs on the basis of their religious identity, and in July the Court affirmed that the First Amendment affords religious schools significant autonomy in employment decisions, according to their religious missions.<sup>1</sup> These two rulings are welcome developments in church–state jurisprudence, but this jurisprudence remains fundamentally flawed. Refrains that are common in political discourse today and that often function as a way to dismiss the moral arguments of religious believers – most obviously, the “separation of church and state,” as well as watchwords like “division,” “entanglement,” or “endorsement” – have their origins in the twentieth-century with the Court’s problematic account of the Establishment Clause’s meaning and application. Americans Catholics committed to revitalizing Catholic education should understand this legal part of the challenge, not only because it affects the contours of acceptable policy but also because it negatively affects our nation’s political discourse and public life more broadly.

The Establishment Clause states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” On its face, it is not exactly clear what this provision means or what it requires, permits, and disallows on the part of governments or churches. People can and do

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<sup>1</sup> See *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*, 591 U.S. \_\_\_, \_\_\_ (2020); and *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, 591 U.S. \_\_\_, \_\_\_ (2020).

disagree on these matters for all kinds of good reasons. Justice Clarence Thomas has argued that the clause is best understood as a federalism provision, enacted to deny the federal government jurisdiction over church–state matters.<sup>2</sup> Justice Antonin Scalia believed that the clause prohibits government coercion, specifically the “coercion of religious orthodoxy and of financial support by force of law and threat of penalty.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, then-Associate Justice William Rehnquist explained that the clause prevents the federal government from establishing a national religion and any government from preferring one religious sect over another, but that governments can provide “nondiscriminatory aid to religion.”<sup>4</sup> Some combination of these approaches seems to be gaining support in today’s Court.

But they are not the dominant or traditional approach, which itself began in 1947, when the Court decided its first major Establishment Clause case. It continues to enjoy support today, as Justice Stephen Breyer illustrated in his dissent from the 5-4 *Espinoza* decision. In a similar case in 2002, Breyer neatly summarized what can be called the “separationist” or “strict neutrality” approach:

The upshot is the development of constitutional doctrine that reads the Establishment Clause as avoiding religious strife, not by providing every religion with an equal opportunity (say, to secure state funding or to pray in the public schools), but by drawing fairly clear lines of separation between church and state – at least where the

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<sup>2</sup> See *Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow*, 542 U.S. 1, 45-50 (2004) (Thomas, J., concurring); *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 U.S. 677, 692-697 (2005) (Thomas, J., concurring); *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, 572 U.S. \_\_ slip op. at 7 (2013) (Thomas, J., concurring); *Espinoza*, 591 U.S. \_\_, slip op. at 25-27 (2020) (Thomas, J., concurring).

<sup>3</sup> *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577, 640-644 (1992) (Scalia, J., dissenting). Justice Thomas has adopted this standard as the clause’s meaning after incorporation.

<sup>4</sup> *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 72 U.S. 38, 106-113 (1985) (Rehnquist, J., dissenting).

heartland of religious belief, such as primary religious education, is at issue.<sup>5</sup>

A strict separation of churches and the state, especially in the area of schooling, is the proper solution – in this view, the constitutional solution – to the potential, inherent in religion itself, for social strife. Such strife, as justices including Wiley Rutledge, William Brennan, and John Paul Stevens have observed, can degrade liberties and destroy governments.<sup>6</sup> Thus, following this logic in both *Espinoza* and *Zelman*, Breyer would have upheld the principle of separation as requiring religious schools to be excluded from voucher and other generally available funding programs.

Both of these cases went the other way, but Breyer’s dissenting opinions stood out against a slim five-justice majority that did little to address the flaws in how the Establishment Clause has historically been understood and, therefore, to remedy – at least in part – the continued legal and political obstacles religious communities continue to face. To understand this approach more fully, it is necessary to revisit the earliest Establishment Clause decisions and their most frequent author, Justice Hugo Black. Black believed that the Establishment Clause had erected a “wall of separation” between churches and the state.<sup>7</sup> Black found this principle of separation specifically in the writings of Thomas Jefferson and more generally in the history of church–state relations in Virginia. In terms of applying the principle, Black explained:

[N]either a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all

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<sup>5</sup> *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 536 U.S. 639, 722-23 (2002) (Breyer, J., dissenting).

<sup>6</sup> *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1, 54 (1947) (Rutledge, J., dissenting); *Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 295 (1963) (Brennan, J., concurring); *Zelman*, 536 U.S. at 686 (Breyer, J., dissenting).

<sup>7</sup> *Everson*, 330 U.S. at 16.

religions, or prefer one religion over another. . . . No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion.<sup>8</sup>

These antiestablishment rules are broader than one might expect upon simply reading the text of the Establishment Clause. Along with the Free Exercise Clause, it is the only Bill of Rights provision directed at one particular governing body, the federal government, and so it is not immediately clear that it should apply to state governments as well. And the text itself says nothing about the proper uses of tax funds or the other matters.

Of course, this broad position isn't necessarily unreasonable or incorrect. Many factors outside the text help determine a clause's meaning. Drafting records, constitutional principles, contemporary usage, and more contribute to an interpretation of how a given clause should apply. One way to make sense of the far-reaching prohibitions that Black created – and, accordingly, to help explain this dominant approach to the Establishment Clause – is to see his rulings (and others in the future) through the lens of legal mischief. As an interpretive tool for judges, mischief “directs attention to the generating problem, which is public and external to the legislature, something that can be considered observable in the world.”<sup>9</sup> This language provides helpful insight into Establishment Clause jurisprudence. For Justice Black, as for many others who followed, the mischief seems to be almost dispositive of the clause's purpose and, thus, one of the most significant factors in how the law will be interpreted and applied.

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<sup>8</sup> *Everson*, 330 U.S. at 15-16. See also *Torcaso v. Watkins*, 367 U.S. 488, 493 (1961).

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Bray, “The Mischief Rule,” *Notre Dame Legal Studies Paper*, no. 19912 (2019): 4-5.

Black understood the Establishment Clause as a response to the “dangers of a union of Church and State.”<sup>10</sup> He characterized these dangers in two ways, as two kinds of mischief, both of which would undergird later developments in Establishment Clause jurisprudence. The first is religious persecution: “It was in large part to get completely away from . . . systematic religious persecution that the Founders brought into being our Nation, our Constitution, our Bill of Rights with its prohibition against any governmental establishment of religion.”<sup>11</sup> The second mischief is twofold: the “hatred, disrespect, and even contempt” for those with contrary beliefs that established religions can engender and the “indirect coercive pressure” to conform that those contrarians face.<sup>12</sup> These mischiefs characterize, for Black, what the Framers sought to avoid when they wrote the Establishment Clause into the Constitution and what, therefore, justices should guard against in deciding such cases. The broad and vague principle of separation was useful for achieving this end. Said otherwise, if the dangers of a union between churches and the state include religious persecution and religious-based hatred among citizens, then judges should be on their guard to keep churches and the state separate.

Since Black’s *Everson* opinion, several notable developments have been made to apply separation in a clearer, more consistent, and more uniform manner. Justice Burger’s *Lemon* test – which requires that legislation have a secular purpose and a principal effect of neither advancing nor inhibiting religion, and that it not foster “excessive entanglement”<sup>13</sup> between church and state – and Justice O’Connor’s endorsement test – which prohibits government from endorsing religion – both represent attempts to operationalize the principle of separation. Burger’s test, which combined decades of work on the part of justices trying to come up with an Establishment Clause standard,

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<sup>10</sup> *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421, 429 (1962).

<sup>11</sup> *Engel*, 370 U.S. at 433.

<sup>12</sup> *Engel*, 370 U.S. at 431, 433.

<sup>13</sup> *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602, 612-13 (1971).

is animated by Black's concern for religious persecution, which became for Burger a concern about "political division along religious lines," the "potential divisiveness of [which] is a threat to the normal political process."<sup>14</sup> O'Connor's test, on the other hand, was born out of Black's concern for religious-based hatred for other citizens, which became for her a concern for social exclusion and the message conveyed to "nonadherents that they are outsiders or less than full members of the political community."<sup>15</sup> These are the clearest attempts to operationalize Black's principle of separation. They build on Black's reasoning and take his assertions about mischief and purpose as the truth about the Establishment Clause.

Many other justices have endorsed the principle of separation, appealing to the mischiefs of religious persecution and emphasizing two attendant evils: social division on the basis of religion and the threat that religious strife poses to democracy. Though their decisions have been more arbitrary – that is, they do not offer the clear kinds of standards that Burger and O'Connor attempted to provide – these justices illustrate the great extent to which the idea of mischief has driven much of Establishment Clause jurisprudence and explains why, in many cases, it seems as though there is much more regard for discretion than for consistency, accuracy, and fidelity to the Constitution itself in these cases. For example, Justice Robert Jackson stated that religious schools must maintain a "strict and lofty neutrality" as to religion.<sup>16</sup> For the Court, though, this neutrality primarily means keeping out divisive forces such as religion. As if to emphasize the point, in *Illinois ex rel. McCollum v. Board of Education*, Justice Felix Frankfurter declared public schools a "symbol of our secular unity" and, as such, entities that must be protected from the

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<sup>14</sup> *Lemon*, 403 U.S. at 622.

<sup>15</sup> *County of Allegheny v. American Civil Liberties Union*, 492 U.S. 627-28 (1989) (O'Connor, J., concurring).

<sup>16</sup> *Everson*, 330 U.S. at 26 (Jackson, J., dissenting).

“divisive force” of religion.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in *Abington School District v. Schempp*, Justice William Brennan explained that public schools are to “train[] American citizens in an atmosphere free of parochial, divisive, or separatist influences of any sort.”<sup>18</sup> Coming full circle to Jackson’s point about neutrality, Brennan then urged that schools adopt a “strict neutrality” as to religion. Since very little is given in the way of specific content for “neutrality,” such a standard easily becomes a veil for arbitrary decision-making.

This dominant approach to the Establishment Clause remains a matter of long-standing precedent, a persuasive approach to the clause for many, and a strong influence on the cultural and political debates over law and religion. But it is based on an understanding of religion as inherently divisive. As such, it uses the principle of separation, applied under a standard of “neutrality,” to exclude religion from the public square. It is, in short, incorrect about religion and the appropriate place of religion in this nation. Its doctrine carries ramifications for religious institutions, especially schools. Public schools are affected because “neutrality” demands that religious content not be taught as truth, while the fact is that some morality is always necessarily taught, implicitly or explicitly, in any educational setting. Private schools are affected because the separationist law of *Everson* remains in place. Also, under *Espinoza* states now cannot exclude religious schools from general programs on the basis of their religious status they are religious, and so they may be wary of enacting any kind of funding program that might raise establishment concerns,

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<sup>17</sup> *Illinois ex rel. McCollum v. Board of Education*, 333 U.S. 203, 216-217, 231 (Frankfurter, J., concurring).

<sup>18</sup> *Abington School District*, 374 U.S. at 242 (Brennan, J., concurring). Brennan also explained, “When the secular and religious institutions become involved . . . there inheres in the relationship precisely those dangers . . . which the Framers feared would subvert religious liberty and the strength of a system of secular government.”

and funding requirements to make them “less religious” may be in order.

But neutrality is not a fact, or even a possibility, in education. Children spend a lot of time at school, actively learning not only how to study and take tests but also how to act and live in relationship with others. From being taught to share Legos to defending friends against bullies and petitioning school administrations to adopt recycling measures, students are constantly acting based on their own judgments about what they should do and being formed in a value system that determines how they ought to act. The question, then, is not whether morality will be taught in any school, including public schools, but what morality will be taught and by whom. Education and morality are fundamentally inseparable. And for many, morality and religion are inseparable – for Christians, as an example, morality is ultimately inseparable from the person of Jesus Christ and the Gospels.

The founders of the earliest American public schools understood this reality. These schools – and the development of education policy and law – grew not out of neutrality but from a vision of the proper relationship between education, the state, and churches. Horace Mann, the early republic’s leading figure in public education, understood the common school as the “*nursery* of piety,”<sup>19</sup> aiming to “earnestly inculcate[ ] all Christian morals.” Accordingly, his schools required students to read the King James Bible.<sup>20</sup> The American public school finds roots in a self-consciously Christian environment. But this Christianity was not a large tent. The Christianity of common schools was, in the eyes of its proponents, a firmly Protestant Christianity directly opposed to the Catholic Church and her faithful, many of whom were immigrating to America in the early nineteenth century.

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<sup>19</sup> Emphasis added. Charles Glenn, “The Myth of the Common School” (PhD diss., Boston University, 1987), 180.

<sup>20</sup> Horace Mann, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education* (Boston: Mass Bd. of Education, 1849), 116-17.

Elsewhere in his writings, Mann explained that the common-school movement “labor[ed] to elevate mankind into the upper and purer regions of civilization, Christianity, and the worship of the true God.” Furthermore, “all those who are obstructing the progress of this cause are impelling the race backwards into barbarism and idolatry.”<sup>21</sup> Those obstructers were, of course, Catholics and other religious groups and families who objected to the emphatic nonneutrality of common schools.<sup>22</sup> This underlying attitude is evidenced in the writings of other common-school supporters. In an 1835 political commentary entitled *Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States*, famed American inventor Samuel Morse asserted, “Where Popery has put darkness, we must put light. Where Popery has planted its crosses, its colleges, its churches, its chapels, its nunneries, Protestant patriotism must put side by side college for college, seminary for seminary, church for church.”<sup>23</sup> This campaign to overcome developing Catholic institutions must be undertaken because, as Morse argued, “Popery is the natural enemy of general education. . . . If it is establishing schools, it is to make them *prisons* of the youthful intellect of the country.”<sup>24</sup> Though based on misunderstandings of Catholicism, these statements make sense within the context of the common-school movement. To make education common was to enable children to learn alongside one another peacefully and patriotically. Any sources of religion and morality outside the American mainstream, especially foreign ones, might divide children and distract from the goal of uniform education. They were therefore viewed with suspicion and excluded from schools and the public square.

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<sup>21</sup> Horace Mann, editor’s note in *The Common School Journal*, vol. 8 (Boston: William B. Fowle, 1846), 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Espinoza*, 591 U.S. \_\_\_, slip op. at 8 (2020) (Alito, J., concurring).

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Finley Morse, *Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States* (New York: H.A. Chapin & Co., 1841), 105.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

Even as mainstream Protestantism and the practice of bible reading fell away in public schools, the supposed “neutrality” that took its place was and remains nonneutral – that is to say, there are things beyond the objectivity of arithmetic and grammar that are taught as the truth in public schools. Such teaching need not include explicitly religious doctrine for it to be fairly described as moral education. In 1949 John Courtney Murray observed, “Thousands of educators of all religious convictions are increasingly agreed that the atmosphere of public schools is *not* free from pressures. Their supposed ‘neutrality’ is itself a pressure.”<sup>25</sup> In practice, attempts at neutrality in a school environment inevitably give rise to hostility toward some moral beliefs while others are favored. Today, as in 1949, public schools and educators maintain an environment that pressures students to affirm certain moral views and to deny others, as any school environment necessarily does.

Attorney General William Barr recently observed, “Many states are adopting curriculum that is incompatible with traditional religious principles according to which parents are attempting to raise their children.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, many are now teaching, for example, progressive views regarding human sexuality and the human person. But because this area is not specifically religious and instead has to do with moral beliefs – which for some, but not all, are informed by their religious beliefs – these curriculum changes may pass under a legal standard of religious neutrality. To object to these changes or to seek to offer teaching that accords with, for instance, the Catholic understanding of the human person and human sexuality would likely be met with charges of fostering social division based on religious beliefs, improper

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<sup>25</sup> John Courtney Murray, S.J., “Law or Prepossessions?” in *Law and Contemporary Problems* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1949): 23, 40.

<sup>26</sup> William Barr, “Remarks to the Law School and the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame,” October 11, 2019, available at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-william-p-barr-delivers-remarks-law-school-and-de-nicola-center-ethics>.

government entanglement with religion, or violation of the separation of church and state.

While no one is attempting explicit religious instruction in public schools, the idea that public schools are neutral, or even could be, is false. Public schools today are secular by law, and religious doctrine is not taught in the classroom. But it would be a mistake to assume that no morality is taught in public schools – that these schools maintain in fact, as Justice Brennan stated is required by the Constitution, a “strict neutrality” as to religion.<sup>27</sup> Such neutrality is impossible.

With this point in mind, Catholics now confronting these challenges should support Catholic schools, rather than leaving them for public schools, as has been the trend for many years. Even before pandemic shutdowns accelerated school closures, Catholic institutions have been on the decline for decades.<sup>28</sup> After peak attendance of about 5.2 million children in the 1960s, just 1.2 million children – less than 3 percent of the school-going population and less than 2 percent of the self-identified American Catholic population – are enrolled in U.S. Catholic schools today.<sup>29</sup> Of course, there are all kinds of reasons for this crisis, including clergy sex-abuse scandals and the response of the institutional Church, as well as dramatic declines in the number of priests and religious, who had typically staffed schools at very low cost.

Ideally, when teachers, administrators, parents, and students alike are dedicated to helping each other become saints, Catholic education

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<sup>27</sup> *Abbington School District*, 374 U.S. at 242 (Brennan, J., concurring).

<sup>28</sup> See “COVID-19 Permanent Private School Closure,” available at <https://www.cato.org/covid-19-permanent-private-closures>.

<sup>29</sup> Nicole Stelle Garnett, “Why We Still Need Catholic Schools,” *City Journal* (July 19, 2020), available at <https://www.city-journal.org/catholic-schools-alternative-for-disadvantaged-kids>; Catherine R. Pakaluk, “The Seton Option: Catholic Schools and Good Citizens,” *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (April 2018): 55; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “The Catholic Church in the United States at a Glance,” available at <http://www.usccb.org/about/public-affairs/backgrounders/upload/The-Church-at-a-Glance-2017.pdf>.

can be an effective means for passing on the faith by demonstrating the harmony between faith and reason, illustrating the beauty of the Church's teachings, and exemplifying the happiness and peace that accompany a life led for Christ and according to the Gospels.<sup>30</sup> This is the case to make to fellow Catholics and to put into practice. Doing so makes for credible witness, which can attract people who would otherwise be inclined to attend public schools and other private schools.

Catholics should focus on their own schools and making the case for Catholic education to their fellow Catholics. Good practice must begin at home. In terms of the broader culture, there is a lot of difficult work to be done. In pointing to how to begin this work, it is worth briefly stating that the Catholic faith is in principle compatible with the American republic. The suspicion on the part of Supreme Court justices who have shaped the application of the Establishment Clause is perhaps understandable, given the country's history and their own time, but it is fundamentally misguided. So too are the prominent Catholics who have argued either that Catholics should check their faith commitments at the door of public life and political action, or that the nation is committed to a certain set of ideals incompatible with the Catholic faith – in particular, an ideal of liberty as the “self-fashioning expressive individual” acting in accord with whatever he desires.<sup>31</sup>

The nation's true commitments accord with human nature in its God-given freedom and purpose: to love our Creator. The Declaration

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<sup>30</sup> See Kathleen Porter-Magee, “Catholic on the Inside: Putting Values Back at the Center of Education Reform,” available at <https://media4.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/Catholic-on-the-Inside-Putting-Values-Back-KPM.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> See, for an example of the first point of view, Mario Cuomo, “Religious Belief and Public Morality: A Catholic Governor's Perspective,” September 13, 1984, available at <http://archives.nd.edu/research/texts/cuomo.htm>. See, for an example of the second point of view, Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 40.

of Independence offers the following account: This nation exists to secure the “unalienable rights” to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” with which humans were endowed by their Creator. Human rights, then, should be respected and secured not because they happen to be whatever one desires according to individual preferences, but because they come from a Creator and are part of the dignity each person enjoys as a being created in, out of, and for love. To respect and secure these rights are to give what each person is due. By stating its purposes as establishing “justice” and securing the “blessings of liberty,” the Constitution operationalizes the link between the two.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the Framers of the Constitution and many of our greatest statesmen who followed rejected the view that liberty consists in nothing more than individual license. Instead, they offered a vision of human liberty as the freedom to do what one ought according to “the laws of nature and nature’s God.”<sup>33</sup> Human nature provides a solid foundation for reflection on the proper place of government and the ultimate end of man.

In 2008 Pope Benedict XVI affirmed, “America’s quest for freedom has been guided by the conviction that the principles governing political and social life are intimately linked to a moral order based on the dominion of God the Creator.”<sup>34</sup> Catholic principles can inform excellent American citizens who affirm the reality of man as *imago Dei*, with God as the source of our dignity and the proper end of

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Const. Preamble.

<sup>33</sup> Publius, *The Federalist Papers*, No. 43, ed. Charles Kesler (New York: Penguin, 1961), 276. See, for more examples, Alexander Hamilton’s “The Farmer Refuted” letter, James Wilson’s *Lectures on Law*, and Frederick Douglass, *The Essential Douglass: Selected Writings & Speeches*, ed. Nicholas Buccola (Hackett: Indianapolis, 2016), 77, 295.

<sup>34</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI,” April 16, 2008, available at [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080416\\_welcome-washington.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080416_welcome-washington.html).

our reason and will. Accordingly, a Catholic readily respects human equality and liberty, the pillars of the American republic that her greatest statesmen have understood as “saving principles.”<sup>35</sup> While not putting their absolute trust in any earthly power or altering their faith commitments for the sake of social approval, American Catholics can and should engage in the public square, charitably articulating their beliefs without diluting them, and prudently arguing for laws and policies, not least in the field of education, consistent with the natural law that is written on every human heart.

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<sup>35</sup> See Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” in *The Essential Douglass*, 53.

# God and Rationality in Three Models of the University

*Jordan Glassman\**

**A** TIME OF POLITICAL CHAOS, civil unrest, and racial tension calls for an examination of history. One does well to recall, among other things, a bold 1944 homily by Fr. Claude H. Heithaus, S.J., who emphatically denounced racial prejudice at Saint Louis University (SLU). Fr. Heithaus asked students to “look at the Blessed Sacrament and answer this question. Will you not do something positive right now to make reparation for the suffering which this prejudice has inflicted upon millions of your fellow Christians?” This plea came a mere 125 years after the founding of the university in 1818.<sup>1</sup> Heithaus’s call for integration forced the SLU administration’s hand, set a tone for other universities in the Midwest, and established his lasting legacy as a reformer and guiding light.

Fifty-five years later a group of faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences at SLU established the Heithaus Forum, an organization to facilitate conversations among faculty about current events and issues at the university.<sup>2</sup> The Forum’s inaugural essay came from David Crossley, a professor of earth and atmospheric sciences, who took the opportunity to detail the recently failed effort to reform the undergraduate core curriculum that he had led for the previous four years. Crossley’s essay details the complexity of core revision that is “frequently a long and frustrating experience, demanding sensitive

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unewsonline.com/2006/04/tesermonthatyearsagodenounceddiscrimination/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://unewsonline.com/2001/10/forumfosterscommunicationforfaculty/>.

administrative guidance and open-minded faculty involvement” and highlights the challenges he faced at SLU.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, Crossley lists what he believes are the steps required for successfully developing and adopting a new curriculum. While the Heithaus Forum dissolved in 2002, conversations about the curriculum at SLU intensified over the next decade and a half, eventually leading to the ratification of nearly every suggestion from Crossley and another attempt at establishing a university-wide core. This latest effort resulted in the passing of SLU’s first university-wide core since the proliferation of its academic offerings in the early twentieth century.

For the past two years I served as the student representative on the committee charged with proposing the new curriculum and seeing through its development or demise. During that time I found myself in a number of workshops, meetings, forums, and conversations that evidenced Crossley’s observation that “passions run about as high here [in core curricular conversations] as anywhere in academia.”<sup>4</sup> The core-related tensions at SLU during the 2019-2020 academic school year were palpable, and the faculty, administration, and students were clearly divided as they struggled to put in place “a philosophical framework that springs from both tradition and educational fashion.”<sup>5</sup> The origins of such division among faculty across the university are manifold and perhaps due to their own in-depth evaluation, but my attempt at understanding the conflict and complexity of the reformation process comes out of the idea that a core curriculum reflects a university’s identity. My diagnosis is that the friction regarding core curriculum issues at SLU arose out of a deeper identity crisis and the collision of three different models of the university favored among the faculty – the so-called multiversity, the New Canon, and the MacIntyrean university.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.eas.slu.edu/People/DJCrossley/coressay.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

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These three models are not exclusive to the second-oldest Jesuit university in the United States, nor do they originate in St. Louis, Missouri. Instead, they spring from ideologies that take very different views of God's role vis-à-vis the educational enterprise and develop rival accounts of rationality.

Accordingly, the task of this paper is to describe the place of God and rationality in each model and encourage urgent consideration of the implications of each model vis-à-vis modern society and the human person.<sup>6</sup>

*Clark Kerr and the Multiversity*

In the fall of 1963, Clark Kerr was invited to give the Godkin Lectures at Harvard University. These lectures produced Kerr's seminal work, *The Uses of the University*, in which the term "multiversity" is developed. Unlike Godkin, a forward-thinking abolitionist, Kerr was not so much a radical as he was a revolutionary, and his domain was higher education. His first major contribution to national higher education was the 1959 "Master Plan for Higher Education in California," which guaranteed access to higher education for every qualified Californian by means of a three-tiered system. This plan sought to tie economic prosperity and social status a university degree, and its implementation was key to Kerr's lifelong mission – to increase access to higher education in pursuit of a more truly democratic society. Increased enrollments led the California system to move away from the more traditional liberal arts curriculum and instead champion science, technology, and related research, thereby fueling economic growth in California. A cyclical structure arose wherein economic

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<sup>6</sup> A second task of this paper is performative in nature. I hope to exemplify a methodology of narrative in each descriptive section. Though I will trace a brief history of each model, I do not wish to give a predominantly historical account of these models of the university. Instead, I will rely on a more general evolutionary approach.

growth and modernization drove the need for more and more graduates to work as skilled laborers.

Kerr was an optimist, an industrial relations mediator, and a man who looked at higher education as an engine for churning out more capable workers to contribute to the stabilization of democracy. His legacy is wrapped up in the 1960s spirit of protest that consumed California institutions of higher education, the golden age of research, and the partnering with government and industry to instrumentalize more formally the college degree.

The project of Kerr's Godkin Lectures and *The Uses of the University* is first and foremost descriptive in nature. Kerr reflects on his understanding of the history of the university, his own education, and his experience as a leader in higher education at a transformative moment in history. He begins by suggesting that the university originated as a "single community" with a "soul" that functions as a "central animating principle," but he quickly turns to the modern university, characterizing it as a "whole series of communities and activities held together by a common name, a common governing board, and related purposes."<sup>7</sup> Kerr refers to American education reformer Abraham Flexner in his opening chapter to illustrate the modern turn from a "community of masters and students with a singular version of nature and purpose" to the university of the 1930s, which understood its purpose as expanding rapidly into research, specialization, and shifting the focus from "the individual student" to the "needs of society."<sup>8</sup>

Kerr's next move is to situate his "multiversity" as the natural successor to John Henry Newman's "Idea of a University" and Flexner's early twentieth-century "Idea of a Modern University" in a historical narrative beginning with the Greeks. The development of the multiversity was not novel or spontaneous but in continuity with and

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<sup>7</sup> Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

inspired by the ends of education for the Greeks – to provide “truth to the philosophers who were to be kings.” Furthermore, it had precedent in the French and German tradition that abandoned a strict classical curriculum and began offering professional and elective course options. With more course options came more agency for students. As Kerr describes this phenomenon, “freedom for the student to choose became freedom for the professor to invent; and the professor’s love of specialization has become the student’s hate of fragmentation.”<sup>9</sup>

A multiversity’s name may be its most important feature, according to Kerr, who sees “protection and enhancement of the prestige” tied to the success of such an institution.<sup>10</sup> Unlike earlier parochial institutions of higher education, the multiversity is not a set of deeply interconnected parts but, instead,

many parts [that] can be added and subtracted with little effect on the whole or even little notice taken or any blood spilled. It is more a mechanism – a series of processes producing a series of results – a mechanism held together by administrative rules and powered by money.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the most crucial component of Kerr’s multiversity is that it does not have any distinctive or proper ends, except possibly aiding in the progress of society by catalyzing the “knowledge industry.”<sup>12</sup> Kerr remarks,

New knowledge is the most important factor in economic and social growth. . . . What the railroads did for the second half of the last century, and the automobile for the first half

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 15. It is worth mentioning that my reading of Kerr leaves me unsettled by his lack a full assessment of the role of prestige in higher education, though the issue is mentioned briefly.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 66.

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of this century, may be done for the second half of the [nineteenth] century by the knowledge industry: that is, to serve as the focal point for national growth.<sup>13</sup>

This assertion sparks a whole series of predictions about “the Future City of Intellect” – a set of developments Kerr expects to see usher in the next phases of the evolution of the multiversity, including the rise of the Ideopolis, faculty guilds, remembrance of the past, external imperatives, and major growth.<sup>14</sup>

Given the extensive but not exhaustive outline of Kerr’s witness to this model of the university, it seems appropriate to develop a proper definition of the multiversity. And yet the former University of California president does not provide a concise one. However, from *The Uses of the University* we are able to deduce that the multiversity is entrepreneurial in its relation to the external world because of its aim to facilitate economic and social growth. This in turn gives rise to its large and hyperbureaucratic structure, which is employed by the state that the multiversity sees itself as integral to supporting and advancing.

*The AAC(∅U) and the New Canon*

The next model of the university, for which I’ve coined the term “New Canon,” is a bit more challenging to describe. Unlike the multiversity, it has much in common with the more traditional liberal arts university, but regard for the liberal arts tradition alone does not fully capture its essence. To develop an understanding of the New Canon, I will examine the history and purpose of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

The Association of American Colleges was founded in 1915 in Chicago,<sup>15</sup> and the original exclusion of “universities” is significant.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Look to *ibid.*, 68-71 for a full articulation of “Ideopolis.”

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.aacu.org/history-aacu>.

Flexner's "Idea of a Modern University" portrays a period of transition away from the once stable liberal arts colleges to a grander, more audacious vision for higher education of tomorrow – the multiversity. During this time, "liberal education and religion – formerly the foundation for all collegiate education" began to be viewed "as mere outposts best served by the small colleges."<sup>16</sup> Faced with the threat of deterioration and irrelevance, college executives came together around the themes of "inclusiveness and interhelpfulness" as they struggled to rearticulate their purpose and importance in a changing world.<sup>17</sup> In 1940 the AAC and the American Association of University professors signed a joint statement that formalized expectations for academic freedom and tenure. The landmark document's stated purpose is "to promote public understanding and support of academic freedom."<sup>18</sup>

The language of the common good is central to understanding the New Canon because its supporters embody the traditional understanding that a holistic approach in higher education leads to a liberating cultivation of the intellect. This approach entails a diversity of texts, perspectives, and disciplines, and it requires that institutions have some internal logic that promotes freedom and the common good.

Eighty years after its inception, the AAC became the AAC&U, in the spirit of supporting universities that were at least partially committed to liberal learning. The modern AAC&U sees itself as an "intensified . . . voice and a force for quality liberal education," and its scope of activity is significantly greater than the initial AAC.<sup>19</sup> While the multiversity model focuses on vocational ends and pluralism, the AAC&U articulates more defined internal expectations for higher education and develops resources like learning outcomes, high impact

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

practices, and evaluative and assessment tools to support the evolution of liberal education.<sup>20</sup> The shift away from a Great Books curriculum – like the fifty-one volumes of Harvard Classics assembled by Charles William Eliot in the early twentieth century – marks an inflection point for liberal education. Gone are the days of mastering a set of humanist works of literature. As Dan Barrett eloquently puts it, “the canon unraveled, pulled apart by disparate forces. By the latter half of the 20th century, students chafed at a core curriculum and demanded more control over their education. ‘Buffet style’ distribution requirements became the norm.”<sup>21</sup> With this new set of distribution requirements, perhaps instigated by the rise of the multiversity, came the fall of the discipline as pathway through a liberal education. Instead, as in the multiversity model, students navigate the New Canon model via outcomes, cultivating skill sets to wade through the copious information at their disposal.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when a traditional liberal arts education begins to unravel and give way to the New Canon. If we look at the AAC&U as an authority, it seems like the New Canon was codified at the turn of the century. Around the time Kerr was finishing his fifth and final edition of *The Uses of the University*, the AAC&U was releasing its own vision for twenty-first-century higher education in a document entitled “Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College.” In it the AAC&U describes “[t]he new practical liberal education – an education for the new century [that] looks beyond the campus to the issues of society and the workplace. It aims to produce global thinkers” by developing “analytical skills, effective communication, practical intelligence, ethical judgment, and social responsibility.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See the section titled “God and Rationality in the New Canon” for more on learning outcomes.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.chronicle.com/article/If-Skills-Are-the-New-Canon/235948>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED468787.pdf>, p. 25.

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If the multiversity is merely the sum of its numerous parts, the New Canon model strives for much more than a summation. In fact, the New Canon sees itself as antithetical, rebelling against the technocratic multiversity in support of a pragmatic but autotelic education, that is, one that has goods internal to it and from which instrumental ends naturally flow. In the New Canon model, the most prominent ends external to the cultivation of the intellect appear to be the development of socially responsible persons who are global citizens and champions of democracy.<sup>23</sup> And yet, despite its attempts to internalize in its rhetoric the goods of outcomes, the New Canon model is under tremendous pressure to justify its existence against the juggernaut that is the multiversity. The financial burden placed on many institutions that champion liberal education is starting to blur the distinction between Kerr's model and the New Canon's cultivation of intellectual skills.<sup>24</sup>

*The MacIntyrean University*

MacIntyre's blueprint emerges in two books, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* and *God, Philosophy, and the University*. The former lays out two key proposals, and the latter offers a detailed description of the MacIntyrean model. One commentator has referred to MacIntyre's idea of the university as "the drawing-out of logical consequences" from his intricate and complex philosophical views.<sup>25</sup>

MacIntyre is critical of the new liberal education, the multiversity that arises in the latter half of the twentieth century, because of its lack

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Institutions that are dedicated to liberal education are also undermining their own stated ends by appealing to the return on investment statistics that make the multiversity an attractive sell to students and families who see higher education exclusively as a means to a job.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald Beiner, "The Parochial and the Universal: MacIntyre's Idea of the University," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 67, no. 2 (2013): 171.

of coherence against a backdrop of cosmopolitan and external ends that have perverted the true aims of the university. The New Canon model that develops out of liberal education and supporting organizations like the AAC&U inches us closer to the MacIntyrean vision of the university, but overtly fails to recognize its self-inflicted wounds. In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* MacIntyre “sees this condition of radical diversity as disabling: as a form of moral ‘confusion’ or moral ‘disorientation,’ which in turn spills over into forms of disability in the political sphere.”<sup>26</sup> Rather than situate ourselves in environments where surface-level conflicts prevent us from seeking answers to more universal questions, he suggests that we submerge ourselves in particularism, or likeminded communities, to maintain hope in something more fundamental. The idea is summed up in this statement: “Creative rational disagreement characteristically takes place against a background of agreement.”<sup>27</sup> Clearly, MacIntyre is concerned with an idea of truth that is more compatible with the New Canon than with the multiversity. He is wholeheartedly aligned with Newman’s commitment that “knowledge is capable of being its own end. Such is the constitution of the human mind, that any kind of knowledge, if it really be such, is its own reward.”<sup>28</sup> I cautioned above that the New Canon’s compromises leave it vulnerable to the enlightenment project of the multiversity, but MacIntyre’s manifold autotelic vision of education is better equipped to resist these tendencies because it is tied to something more permanent than earthly citizenship or rights. Catholic philosophers like MacIntyre refocus attention on the deepest human concerns; they keep the ship steady

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>27</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 223.

<sup>28</sup> John Henry Newman, *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 170.

and preserve the rich philosophical tradition that asks what it means to be human.

MacIntyre's first proposal is abandoning the lecture and instead creating a "theater of intelligence" where the professor is responsible for cultivating a strong intellectual picture of a particular viewpoint. In this model, "rival and antagonistic views of rational justification, such as those of genealogists and Thomists, are afforded the opportunity both to develop their own enquiries."<sup>29</sup> Students and professors subject initial ideas to differing viewpoints within an intentional communal setting designed to preserve ongoing conflicts among traditions.

His second proposal is to establish three sets of universities, each of which embraces a different set of principles that may or may not qualify as a genuine tradition: encyclopedia, genealogy, and Tradition. Encyclopedia embodies enlightenment liberalism, genealogy embodies Nietzschean thinking, and Tradition embodies the Thomistic perspective, which is used to push back against the philosophical relativism that develops out of the former versions of moral enquiry.<sup>30</sup> In turn, commingling institutions via "forums in which the debate between rival types of enquiry was afforded rhetorical expression" would be encouraged.<sup>31</sup>

Both of these propositions take seriously the university's charge "to provide and sustain institutionalized means for their expression, to negotiate the modes of encounter between opponents, to ensure that rival voices were not illegitimately suppressed, [and] to sustain the university."<sup>32</sup>

MacIntyre proposes a third option in *God, Philosophy, Universities*, one of his few theistic works. In this model, MacIntyre calls for "a

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 222-33.

<sup>30</sup> For more on these philosophical schools of thought see MacIntyre's *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 231.

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university in which philosophy occupies a central, integrative position, essentially open toward theology on the one hand and, on the other hand, equally open to the human and natural sciences.”<sup>33</sup> This version of the university aligns with Newman’s, while making explicit its dedication to the study of truth rather than of mere ideologies. Scholar John Rist suggests that the curriculum in such an institution would have to be carefully organized so as to promote the “study of truth, rather than mere techniques or ideologies” and to “emphasize the interrelation of their [subject’s] goals, together with a clear recognition that no speciality, however advanced, can give us the whole truth.”<sup>34</sup>

*God and Rationality in the Multiversity*

Kerr documents well the twentieth-century university with the primary objective of explaining how it worked and the world in which it emerged and expanded. In Kerr’s social science imagination, explanation had an honored place. While his account of the multiversity does not explicitly make normative claims, he does draw selectively from history in a way that, on occasion, implicitly illuminates what he valued in higher education.

The multiversity as a model lacks the subtlety of Kerr, who remains mostly agnostic in his explication of the multiversity – a model that “worshiped no single God.”<sup>35</sup> In fact, though the model presents as agnostic or ambivalent about matters of transcendence, the multiversity’s underlying presuppositions create the conditions for a failure to grasp its own theological contribution to society. There is nothing eternal about the multiversity. Kerr’s model is an embodiment of the Enlightenment’s conception of the world in entirely

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<sup>33</sup> Reinhard Hütter, “God, the University, and the Missing Link – Wisdom: Reflections on Two Untimely Books,” *The Thomist* 73, no. 2 (2017): 254-55.

<sup>34</sup> John Rist, “MacIntyre’s Idea of a University: Theory and Practice,” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 67, no. 2 (2013): 163.

<sup>35</sup> Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 103.

disenchanted terms.<sup>36</sup> In other words, all goals in the multiversity are measured, scientific, vocational, pluralistic, mechanical, modular, cosmopolitan, research-driven, and contractorlike, which gives way to learning that is strictly outcome-based. Thus, the best way of describing God's place in the multiversity is to say that it is nonexistent.

Kerr's multiversity could not be further from the MacIntyrean vision, which is grounded in parochialism and intentional theism. Kerr "thought of [the university] as a series of individual faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over parking."<sup>37</sup> The hyperindividualistic logic that emerges manifests as instrumental rationality ordered toward the pursuits of individual entrepreneurs engaged in highly specialized research, with each discipline confined to its own narrow methods and domain of reason.

Ultimately, the multiversity is a rejection of the notion that a liberal arts education has definite or lasting value, and a rejection of the liberal arts is certainly a rejection of the humanistic disciplines of philosophy, theology, ethics, and so on. When we draw from MacIntyre's account of ethics and morality, we understand that these fields of study help us understand that we are not stagnant beings but, rather, ones with the ability to actualize ourselves by exercising virtue in order to move from who we are to who we ought to be. The multiversity is uninterested in any such actualization and sees its end, instead, as the accumulation of knowledge and skills in order to contribute materially to society.

#### *God and Rationality in the New Canon*

While the pluralistic multiversity has no special regard for the question of God, the New Canon recognizes that there are important,

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<sup>36</sup> The use of "disenchanted" in this context is borrowed from the German sociologist Max Weber, who in his 1918 lecture "Science as a Vocation" uses disenchantment to describe a rejection of mysticism, religion, and wonder in favor of science, bureaucracy, and secularism.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

*God and Rationality in Three Models of the University*

formative texts, many of which concern God, and that each person educated liberally should be aware of this tradition. However, the model is largely secularized insofar as its aims are temporal: developing intellectually “free” students who will be tomorrow’s leaders. Religion is not excluded in the New Canon, but it is not a central or defining feature. In fact, the New Canon model’s propensity to attract a broad range of faculty also makes it likely to hollow out the meaning of deep religious commitments and teach them disinterestedly to a broader range of students.

The AAC&U’s approach acknowledges that the multiversity leaves out much of what universities can and should do, but the alternative it proposes is similarly disenchanted. All goals are quantifiable and this-worldly. New Canon institutions embrace an antitraditional liberalism that echoes the suggestion of David Hume that “reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions” or that each individual should get to decide what is good for himself.<sup>38</sup>

The AAC&U’s website and learning outcome literature reveals that the New Canon model is strictly concerned with the temporal world. There is no purpose other than to be a competent citizen striving for enlightenment and material progress in the world. The MacIntyrean model differs, importantly, because its temporal goals are all intended to serve greater eternal ones, and this perspective pervades every facet of its methods and substance.

*God and Rationality in the MacIntyrean University*

Simply put, the MacIntyrean university does not exist but for God. Its *telos* is transcendent. God is the terminus of the university because the truth is God recognized as both utterly mysterious and accessible to reason.

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<sup>38</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David F. Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 266.

*Jordan Glassman*

A key difference between the New Canon and MacIntyrean models is that learning outcomes and leadership in democracy, the goals of the New Canon model, are this-worldly, while the MacIntyrean university aims at unity with God in heaven, which is already but not yet – we are always on the way to this full realization of our being. As Reinhard Hütter notes, “human beings can only comprehend themselves in even an approximately adequate way if they understand themselves as fundamentally directed towards God.”<sup>39</sup>

Rationality in this model of the university is tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive. Reason is the goal we are pursuing, but we are active participants who recognize that we have limited understanding and must engage with others, both within and outside our own tradition.

While the multiversity, the New Canon, and the MacIntyrean university all deal with the notion of citizenship, only the last imagines its objective as developing in students an understanding that human beings are dual citizens: “We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self.”<sup>40</sup>

*Conclusion*

This paper lays out three distinct models of the university, but it is important to understand that institutions today may not fit perfectly into any of one of them. Each model’s principles and underlying theology, however, call to mind important questions of identity, purpose, and meaning in modern higher education.

I began by pointing to Fr. Heithaus’s landmark sermon. Though I think the respect and honor he received is wonderful and deserved, I

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<sup>39</sup> Hütter, “God, the University, and the Missing Link – Wisdom,” 258-59.

<sup>40</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God*, 14.28.

would like to offer that his bold speech denouncing racial discrimination was not a spontaneous phenomenon. In fact, it may be said to have come out of the rich tradition and subtradition that he belonged to, both of which remain strong today.<sup>41</sup> The Catholic and Jesuit traditions formed Heithaus's worldview and understanding of human nature. Furthermore, he was confronted with incoherence at his institution and found resources to address it both within and outside his own tradition. Similarly, the Heithaus Forum aimed to facilitate critical conversations about "the future of the SLU community in matters of intellectual and professional life" because faculty thought it essential to open a space for dialogue for the purposes of questioning and aligning administrative decision-making with the tradition and increasingly complex identity of the institution.<sup>42</sup>

The goal of this paper is to stress that the multifaceted disruptions facing higher education today require academic communities to think deeply about their traditions when making decisions that profoundly impact institutional identity. With a critical look at tradition, it is imperative that we consider the implicit theologies and subsequent versions of rationality that are inherent to the models I have presented in this paper. Institutions of higher education, especially those that are faith-based, must take up these issues of identity against a "background of agreement," as MacIntyre suggests, if they are to find coherence in their missions.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> One of the chief carriers of these traditions I encountered at Saint Louis University is Dr. Gregory Beabout, a professor of philosophy who has inspired and helped me develop many of the thoughts articulated in this paper and many others.

<sup>42</sup> <https://unewsonline.com/2001/10/forumfosterscommunicationforfaculty>.

<sup>43</sup> MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 223.

# Closed Wallets and Open Hearts: Boycotting in Light of Economic Charity

*Chance Hebert\**

**I**S A CHRISTIAN MORALLY OBLIGED to boycott companies that support unethical causes? For example, is a Christian allowed to buy coffee from Starbucks, a store that directly supports unethical programs and institutions such as Planned Parenthood, or does some precept require that he refrain from buying Starbucks coffee as long as the company continues to contribute to Planned Parenthood? How about shopping at AutoZone, Nike, Shell, or the other seventy-plus companies that support the abortion provider and other organizations with morally questionable missions, such as the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, Girls, Inc., the American Civil Liberties Union, and so on?

Boycotting causes some division within the Christian community as there are a number of perspectives on the issue. At the center are two main questions: Is boycotting required, and is boycotting an act of charity?

*The Issue of Permission*

Asking whether or not boycotting a company like Starbucks is required is the same as asking if it is a sin to shop at Starbucks. Determining whether or not someone is personally culpable for direct participation in an evil is important, for, as the *Catechism of the Catholic*

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*Church* clearly states, “we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them by participation directly and voluntarily in them.”<sup>1</sup> However, patronizing stores like Starbucks is not a matter of *direct* participation but, rather, of indirect participation.

The *Catechism* also states that we are responsible for cooperation in evil deeds “by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them; by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so; [and] by protecting evil-doers.”<sup>2</sup> And so, it could be argued that someone who purchases coffee from Starbucks supports abortion and fails in his responsibility to oppose the operations of Planned Parenthood, for every purchase from Starbucks is a form of deliberate, indirect participation in the social evil of abortion. Under this analysis, boycotting would be required in order to avoid moral cooperation in sin.

However, one could argue, on the other hand, that the Starbucks patron’s intention is not to support Planned Parenthood but, rather, to praise God for the gift of good coffee. As St. Paul says, “Eat whatsoever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the grounds of conscience. For ‘the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it. . . . So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.’”<sup>3</sup> Here it sounds as if St. Paul teaches that any purchase is permitted so long as it is done for the glory of God, which would mean that boycotting is not absolutely required of the Christian. But, as will be discussed later, while St. Paul does not necessarily condemn eating meat that has been sacrificed, for much of the meat from the meat markets of Paul’s day was of such origin, he does give good reason to avoid doing so in certain cases.

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<sup>1</sup> CCC, 1868.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 10:25-31.

The dilemma of indirect participation in social evils when shopping is difficult to overcome because there are no clear laws or precepts directing how exactly a Christian ought to act within a free market, and arguments can be made both for and against boycotting certain stores or products. Aside from the question of the lawfulness of shopping at certain stores, however, it is clear that patronizing them may not bring about the greatest good. Perhaps “what is permitted?” is not exactly the right question for the Christian to ask. After all, if the purpose of inquiring into precepts is to clarify how to achieve holiness, would it not make more sense to ask about counsels<sup>4</sup> and what is good and advisable, rather than simply what is allowed? As St. Paul says, “All things are lawful,<sup>5</sup> but not all things are helpful.”<sup>5</sup> If boycotting could be shown to be a good and charitable act, even if not a strict requirement, ought not the Christian take up the yoke of boycotting out of love for Christ? The question thus changes from “what is a Christian allowed to do?” to “what is good for a Christian to do?”

Christ himself encourages this kind of thinking when he says to the rich man, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus’ words concern not what is commanded, nor what is permitted, for the rich man did in fact live within the bounds of the law; rather, his words concern what is charitable and helpful for those who desire to live fully in accordance with the *Logos*. Following Christ’s counsel for achieving perfection, we can leave behind the question of whether or not one is forbidden from shopping at stores that support questionable causes, and we can take up instead the task of examining whether or not charity calls us to commit to the act of boycotting.

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<sup>4</sup> A precept is a law, whereas counsel is advice. To follow a precept is required, and to disobey a precept is a sin. To follow a counsel is not required but is expedient or helpful, and not to follow a counsel, while not a sin, is missing an opportunity to grow in holiness. This distinction is important for understanding the relationship between expedient actions and moral obligations. This entire paper should be read as a counsel to boycott.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor 10:23.

<sup>6</sup> Mt 19:16-22.

*Closed Wallets and Open Hearts*

In taking up this new question of so-called expedience, or what is helpful for achieving holiness, we will consider three things: the responsibility of freedom, the responsibility of power, and the moral responsibility of buyers to sellers. Examining buyer choice in light of these three responsibilities will clarify the expedience of boycotting. But first, let's define the word "boycott."

*What Does Boycotting Mean?*

Thus far, "boycott" has been used simply to mean refraining from shopping. I would like to distinguish now between boycotting and merely refraining from shopping. For the purpose of this argument a boycott should be understood as intentionally withholding purchases in protest, with the goal of effecting change. If there is no protest, then there is no boycott. Furthermore, in order for a boycott to be effective three conditions must be met: The person boycotting must have been a regular or anticipated customer, otherwise his not shopping would have no effect; the person must communicate to the company what changes he seeks, otherwise the company may misinterpret his protest; and the person must intend to cease the boycott once the changes he seeks have been realized, otherwise the company will have no reason to concede. Furthermore, since the aim of a boycott is to bring about change in companies with multiple customers, it is generally more effective if a large group of customers boycotts in solidarity, although this is not always the case.

Having defined a boycott as a consumer protest, we can now examine its relationship to market freedom.

*Responsible Freedom*

In an address at the White House, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI remarked, "Freedom is not only a gift, but also a summons to personal

responsibility.”<sup>7</sup> If this is true, then responsibility must be presupposed in a free market economy for the system to be truly free. Furthermore, if we interpret the word “freedom” as freedom for excellence, which has been described by George Weigel “as the capacity to choose wisely and to act well as a matter of habit,”<sup>8</sup> then we must conclude that with every market choice comes the responsibility to choose well, the responsibility to discern whether or not a transaction is truly good. This kind of freedom demands two levels of responsibility: responsibility to oneself and responsibility to others. The latter, which is what boycotting concerns, since it aims to change the actions of others, can be grasped only in light of solidarity.

Pope St. John Paul II defines solidarity as “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.”<sup>9</sup> In support of this claim that all are responsible for all, the pope states that “the fact that men and women in various parts of the world feel personally affected by the injustices and violations of human rights committed in distant countries . . . is a further sign of a reality transformed into awareness.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, we live in a world where each choice we make has real effects on other persons. Thus our freedom, including our economic freedom, must be exercised in view of the responsibility to choose the good not only for one’s own sake but also for the sake of the common good, which is defined as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.”<sup>11</sup> In our coffee case, for example, the

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<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI” (April 6, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> George Weigel, “A Better Concept of Freedom,” *First Things* (March 2002), available at <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2002/03/a-better-concept-of-freedom>.

<sup>9</sup> *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 38.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, 26.

customer has the responsibility not only to think about his immediate needs and desires but also to discern whether or not his choice to buy from Starbucks is an act of solidarity. A consideration of buyer power will help this discernment by placing the choice in the proper context and clarifying how a boycott is an important act of solidarity.

*Buyer Power and Its Moral Implications*

In *Power and Responsibility*, prominent twentieth-century German philosopher and theologian Romano Guardini defines power as “the ability to give purpose to things,” the conscious direction of energy.<sup>12</sup> In light of this definition, the power of buying can be understood as the ability to give value to a good or service and to direct the economy toward some end. Furthermore, boycotting can be understood as the deliberate exercise of buyer power to discourage or devalue some good or service. Since a buyer purchases only what he deems worthy of his coin, he is capable of giving purpose to the energy of sellers by asserting his own value judgment of what they are offering in the market. Here lies the moral responsibility to affirm true values for the sake of promoting good and shunning evil.

German economist Wilhelm Röpke, another prominent twentieth-century thinker, describes this very fact when he states that in a market economy “the individual is forced by competition to seek his own success in serving the market, that is, the consumer. Obedience to the market ruled by free prices is rewarded by profit, just as disobedience is punished by loss and eventual bankruptcy.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, if a seller does not offer goods and services that align with the tastes and

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<sup>12</sup> Romano Guardini, “Power and Responsibility,” in *The End of the Modern World*, ed. Richard Neuhaus (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1998), 122.

<sup>13</sup> Wilhelm Röpke, *A Humane Economy: The Social Framework of the Free Market*, trans. Elizabeth Henderson (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), 122.

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values of consumers, he cannot make a profit. In this way, the seller necessarily finds himself governed by the choices of the consumers.

Overall, the power of the buyer is to affirm and assert value, and a boycott is one way in which this power can be wielded intentionally. Of course, in order that people might use the power of buying responsibly to promote truth and virtue, “a great deal of educational and cultural work is urgently needed.”<sup>14</sup> This idea brings us directly to one of the greatest responsibilities that a consumer has, namely, the responsibility to show charity to producers.

*Responsibility of Buyers to Sellers*

In addition to the responsibility of promoting the overall virtue of an economy by means of their consumer choices, buyers also owe charity to specific individuals. Regardless of how large a business may be, it always comprises individual persons who must be treated with respect. And so every buyer must consider the charity owed to sellers, whether the latter is someone working for a multinational corporation or for a local coffee shop.

In regard to buying, charity requires some consideration of how a purchase may affect the soul of the seller. Henry Lloyd offers some insight into the nature of this relationship:

Our tyrants are our ideals incarnating themselves in men born to command. What these men are we have made them. . . . [W]e go hopelessly astray if we seek the solution to our problems in the belief that our business rulers are worse men in kind than ourselves. . . . The public does not withhold its favor, but deals with them, protects them, refuses to treat their crimes as it treats those of the poor, and admits them to the highest places.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Lloyd, *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, ed. Thomas Cochran (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1963), 169.

Here Lloyd argues that consumers are in some way culpable for the sins of business leaders because the former have affirmed the latter in their errant ways. Business leaders are a product of the culture, and the truth remains that encouraging and enabling sin is the opposite of love, notwithstanding the material benefits we may reap along the way.

The idea that a buyer has a responsibility to the soul of the seller applies directly to the dilemma at the beginning of this essay. It is well known that many companies financially support unethical causes, and many Christians are concerned about their moral culpability in supporting such causes. But Christians should also be concerned for the souls of the individuals associated with those companies. While the products on offer may not themselves be related to the unethical causes (coffee, for example), purchasing them may be, insofar as the profit from the transaction supports an unethical cause, and employees and owners are enslaved, in a sense, by these very profits that support social evils. By shopping at stores, such as Starbucks, that explicitly advertise their support of unethical causes or companies such as Planned Parenthood, an individual assents and thereby encourages individuals within the company to continue their direct involvement with sin. In this way consumer behavior not only supports a social evil but also jeopardizes the souls of specific individuals.

Perhaps no one states this idea more eloquently than St. Paul. In the First Letter to the Corinthians, which was quoted in part above, he writes:

“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. (But if someone says to you,

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“This has been offered in sacrifice,” then out of consideration for the man who informed you, and for conscience’ sake—I mean his conscience, not yours—do not eat it.)<sup>16</sup>

Here St. Paul tells the Corinthians that the consciences of others are more important than their own freedoms. We may transpose this thought for the times: Aside from the question of whether buying Starbucks coffee is damaging to one’s own soul, which may not be the case according to Paul, it may be damaging to the soul or conscience of others around you who are aware of your purchase’s connection to Planned Parenthood. Scripture commentator George Haydock explains this relationship in this way:

Either he [the man who brought attention to the sacrifice] is an infidel that says it: and then by saying so, he may mean that they who eat it, ought to eat it in honour of their gods. Or if a weak brother says so, he thereby signifies, that his conscience judges it not lawful to be eaten.<sup>17</sup>

My purchases from certain companies can cause scandal when someone else knows that I am willingly contributing to a company that supports evil. It would thus seem to be the case that, when the unethical dealings of a company are well known, it is good to refrain from shopping for the sake of offering good witness to others, including the people from whom you would be buying. Given our assessment of personal responsibility in the marketplace, not only would it be good to refrain from making purchases at stores that support unethical causes, but also, for the sake of the charity that St.

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor 10:23-29.

<sup>17</sup> George Haydock, “Commentary on 1 Corinthians 10: 27,” in *The Haydock Catholic Bible Commentary*, available at <https://www.ecatholic2000.com/haydock/ntcomment151.shtml>.

Paul encourages, it would be even more helpful to take up a direct role in saving the souls of producers by adopting the practice of boycotting.

Haydock offers a useful summary of the two principles at the heart of St. Paul's teaching: "the edification of the Church, and the spiritual good of our neighbor."<sup>18</sup> Taking these as our principles for economic charity we may raise the question: In what ways does patronizing businesses like Starbucks, Nike, Shell, Adobe, or Bank of America edify persons or promote their spiritual good? Our analysis has shown how boycotting helps achieve these ends, but can the same be said of buying from these companies?

### *Conclusion*

Many Christians desire to live a good life, but they often seek peace by drawing lines and limits for action rather than looking to the greater goods that the Lord invites them to take up. In the free market, where every day Christians have wide-ranging freedom and a plethora of choices to make, it can be tempting to set the bar low, asking what is permitted and settling for the status quo. But we must remember that our freedom entails great responsibility, particularly as consumers who wield a great amount of power in their economic decision-making. We must remember that solidarity would have us give consideration for the souls of all, especially those from whom we buy, and that charity calls us to love our neighbors so that we sacrifice what is lawfully permitted for the sake of saving the souls of others and perhaps even saving our own souls. Rather than occasionally closing our wallets, we

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<sup>18</sup> Haydock, "Commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:25," available at [https://www.ecatholic2000.com/haydock/ntcomment151.shtml?.](https://www.ecatholic2000.com/haydock/ntcomment151.shtml?)

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should, through courageous and sacrificial boycotting, outwardly encourage all producers to open their hearts to the fullness of the truth.

*Sicut et ego per omnia omnibus placeo, non quaerens quod mihi utile est, sed quod multis: ut salvi fiant.*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 1 Cor 10:33. Douay-Rheims translation: “As I also in all things please all men, not seeking that which is profitable to myself, but to many, that may be saved.”



# Shareholder vs. Stakeholder: A False Dichotomy

*Nicholas Spinelli\**

ON AUGUST 19, 2019, the Business Roundtable (BR), a group of 181 American CEOs, issued a new statement on the purpose of corporations. This statement is a revision of the decades-long definition from a *New York Times* article by Milton Friedman in which Friedman quotes from his book *Capitalism and Freedom*. “[T]here is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud.”<sup>1</sup> This statement encapsulates what is known as Friedman’s shareholder theory. By contrast, the BR’s new definition focuses on stakeholders and includes goals such as delivering value to customers, investing in employees, dealing fairly with suppliers, supporting communities, and generating long-term value for shareholders.<sup>2</sup> The stakeholder theory, from which the BR has drawn, can be traced back to Edward Freeman’s book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Freeman’s theory clearly takes a broader view than Friedman’s.

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<sup>1</sup> Milton Friedman, “A Friedman Doctrine – The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits,” *The New York Times* (September 1970): 23-33, 133-36.

<sup>2</sup> Business Roundtable, “Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation” (August 2019), available at <https://www.businessroundtable.org/business-roundtable-redefines-the-purpose-of-a-corporation-to-promote-an-economy-that-serves-all-americans>.

*Shareholder Theory*

Milton Friedman popularized shareholder theory in the 1970s. According to his position, corporate executives are agents of shareholders, and therefore their primary responsibility is to shareholders. In his view, a firm has a social responsibility to its shareholders. Friedman argues that the primary goal of a corporation is to maximize profits and distribute them to shareholders, at which point shareholders may do whatever they wish with their earnings. Friedman's position is straightforward, but this makes it susceptible to misinterpretation. It follows from Friedman's argument that corporate executives who give company money to organizations in order to support causes such as medical, educational, and environmental organizations are stealing that money from shareholders. The theory emphasizes the freedom of individuals to act on their own behalf and out of their own self-interest. With respect to the issue of charitable contributions, shareholders are the ones who rightly make such decisions, not corporate executives. If a shareholder cares enough about a certain social cause, then he or she should be able to donate his or her own money to support it. This should not be the company's decision to make.

The conventional understanding of Friedman's shareholder theory has led to unintended negative consequences including cronyism, short-term planning, and depressed wages. Former General Electric CEO Jack Welch was quoted in *Forbes*: "[S]hareholder value is a result, not a strategy. . . . [Y]our main constituencies are your employees, your customers, and your products. Managers and investors should not set share price increases as their overarching goal."<sup>3</sup> Welch's criticism misconstrues Friedman's theory of social responsibility. He overlooks the distinction between matters integral or not to the function of a

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<sup>3</sup> Steve Denning, "The World's Dumbest Idea," *Forbes* (July 2017).

business. Nonetheless, these negative unintended consequences have occurred in the name of maximizing shareholders' value. To me, the most notable perversion of Friedman's theory is the obsession with short-term profits and planning, which limit future capital investment in order to boost corporate earnings. This is evident in seemingly perpetual earnings seasons and quarterly guidance issued by public companies.

Critics blame Friedman and shareholder theory for allowing executives to act immorally in the pursuit of profits. "Economists like Friedman . . . proposed a license for enterprises to pursue unbridled self-interest across an entire society. Who can blame them for pushing the guiding metaphor of their profession to its logical conclusion?"<sup>4</sup> In my estimation, these are problems of greed – not shareholder theory. Surely, capitalism and Friedman do not have a monopoly on the greediness of humans. Greed existed before capitalism, and it will exist regardless of the economic system under which we operate. Moreover, capitalism is the best economic system to limit the greed of individuals by encouraging commerce. Voluntary exchange checks individual's greed through a process of mutual benefit. There must be some good to be gained by doing business, otherwise the parties involved would be better off not having done business in the first place.

Although Friedman does not refer to stakeholder theory in his definition of a corporation, it is fair to say that his view is compatible with that theory. Friedman does not make specific value judgments as to how companies should go about treating the other parties included in the BR's statement. Nowhere does he assert that shareholders should mistreat or do harm to their employees, customers, suppliers, or their communities to increase shareholder wealth. I do not believe Friedman would argue against any particular point in the BR's statement, but the real question is how exactly to accomplish each of its five goals. At that level of specificity is where I believe Friedman

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

*Shareholder vs. Stakeholder*

would differ from Freeman. But why does shareholder theory face such heavy criticism for the way employees, customers, and suppliers are treated today? I have to wonder why any of these groups would do business with a company that did not add value for them. Workers, customers, and suppliers are free to choose what they deem best for themselves. Friedman's statement of a corporation's purpose is general and straightforward. He does not indicate one way or another how employees, customers, and suppliers should be treated, and by my understanding he would argue for letting the market judge who treats their stakeholders well and who does not.

*Stakeholder Theory*

Edward Freeman developed the stakeholder theory in the 1980s, and it has garnered increased popularity in recent years. The BR's recent statement draws inspiration from it and includes the already mentioned goals of delivering value to customers, investing in employees, dealing fairly with suppliers, supporting communities, and generating long-term value for shareholders. Stakeholder theory suggests replacing three assumptions of shareholder theory: business is transactional; executives must make tradeoffs; and humans are primarily self-interested and opportunistic.<sup>5</sup> However, one should note that shareholder theory does not depend on these assumptions.

First, to suggest something pejorative about business by calling it "transactional" is to diminish the role of human interaction in business. Doing so puts humans and machines on the same level. Also, while some aspects of business might be transactional, business is fundamentally about relationships. Business is about how a company

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<sup>5</sup> R. Edward Freeman, Bidhan L. Parmar, and Kirsten E. Martin, "Responsible Capitalism: Creating Value for Stakeholders," in *Re-imagining Capitalism: Building a Responsible, Long-Term Model*, ed. Dominic Barton, Dezso J. Horvath, and Matthias Kipping (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 139.

makes its employees or customers feel. Business is about a give-and-take reality.

Second, trade-offs are a part of everyone's life. All day every day we make trade-offs. There is no way around this reality. Also, while tradeoffs exist in business, they need not be detrimental to shareholders. For example, if a company chooses to compensate its employees more generously than its competitors, that does not necessarily mean a loss to shareholders. Consider the following scenario. Company X's shareholders and executives offer a better compensation package than Company Y. The workers of Company X are more motivated and productive than those employed by Company Y. Therefore, Company X receives greater profits. And so, it is clear that one group's gain does not necessarily entail another's loss. If the free market has taught us anything, it is that capitalism is not a zero-sum game. If Company X's shareholders, executives, and employees' interests are aligned, each group achieves an end that is part of an overall system of mutually beneficial value-creation, which is possible only through voluntary cooperation.

Third, humans are naturally self-interested creatures, and that is not necessarily a bad thing. I have yet to learn of a time or people who were not interested in their own well-being, and it is important to distinguish being self-interested from being selfish. Stakeholder theorists assume that humans are complicated and aspire to be a part of something larger than ourselves. Yes, humans are social creatures. That is not a new insight. Humans are naturally both self-interested and other-interested. Wage-earners in families do not hoard the bounty of their labor; they share it with their family and friends. Take, for example, the television show *House Hunters*, where we see clients searching for homes with ample space to entertain guests, or Food Network shows about preparing dishes to share with others. These programs demonstrate that humans act in a variety of ways, and self-interest and opportunity are not their only motives. I do not deny that humans can be selfish, but it is also true that they are just as capable of

being selfless. Recall the discussion of greed mentioned above. Selfishness is not unique to capitalism or shareholder theory, and it will exist regardless of it.

Challenges to shareholder theory are attempts at creating some utopian view of capitalism. Stakeholder theory may theoretically work; however, I am skeptical about its practical consequences. Stakeholder theory fails to substantially differentiate itself from shareholder theory for success and creates new impediments for failure. The issues of ownership, order of precedence, and fiduciary responsibility should be considered. This reminds me of the old saying “If you have more than one boss, then you don’t have a boss at all.” In what order should companies consider the interests of the various stakeholders? If companies follow the order laid out in the BR’s statement, shareholders’ interests come last! Other stakeholders may take an active role in negotiating and dealing with companies, a privilege most shareholders do not have. Furthermore, managers have a fiduciary responsibility to shareholders because they are professionally commissioned as shareholders’ agents. There is a principal-agent problem if executives are making decisions with shareholders as their last priority.

Supporters of stakeholder theory are concerned with the various groups interested in the success of an enterprise, and they should be! Still, suppliers, communities, and so on have no claims on property already owned by another group. What is proper to shareholders – long-term value-creation and planning – ought to be cared for by shareholders. What is proper to management – short-term value-creation and oversight of day-to-day operations – ought to be cared for by management. What is proper to employees – the execution of day-to-day tasks – ought to be cared for by employees. Each of these groups is a part of a corporation, but they do not constitute a comprehensive list of all the groups interested in the success of an enterprise. Customers, suppliers, and society at large also have interests

in the success of a business venture; however, those interests do not entitle them to any legal claim on the private property of a business.

### *Resolution*

The shareholder and stakeholder theories are compatible because of their broad scope and general nature. Both leave room for interpretation and prudential judgment so that corporations may work to strike the right balance among the interests of shareholders and other stakeholders. In my judgment, this is acceptable. One of the great advantages of the free market system is that it is not planned. Theories may serve as guidelines, but they should not rigidly limit opportunities for innovative problem-solving. Shareholder theory and stakeholder theory offer basic ground rules and principles for running a business, and each has its advantages and disadvantages. Thus, it is best to let each company experiment, discover, and decide for itself how it will proceed.

Capitalism is an economic system based on private property rights, legal institutions that enforce those rights, and an incentive structure by which people fulfill their dignity through work, creating value to exchange with others. Entrepreneurs typically do not start businesses for the sake of making profits. Most entrepreneurs start businesses because they believe they can organize resources more effectively. The profits or losses of a business are merely a signal for the entrepreneur, indicating whether the new organization of resources is desirable to other members of society. Yet profit is not the only factor to consider when evaluating a business. In fact, the human person is at the center of every business. Businesses are voluntary associations of people working together toward the common goal of creating value for others. Therefore, business is intrinsically other-oriented.

The businessman is traditionally depicted as a greedy, lying, cheating, self-serving jackass, but this caricature could not be further from the truth. Business is a noble vocation. This is the lens through

which we should evaluate business and the individuals who give life to it. Ask any worker, “What is your vocation?” He or she may have a great answer to that question, but my bet is that the vast majority do not think about their work in such terms. Why do we work? We work not just for ourselves, but for our families – to put a roof over their heads, to put food on the table, and to put the kids through school. We must remember these motives when speaking of work. Through work, man actualizes his potential by participating in creation and thereby becomes more fully human.

Capitalism is not a top-down, centrally planned system. Individuals are free to pursue their own happiness, but that freedom in no way precludes selfless action done out of love for one’s neighbor. Freedom under capitalism comes with a great deal of responsibility because the emphasis is on the individual. It is up to the individual to direct his or her life. Capitalism does not guarantee happiness, but it does afford abundant opportunities for achieving it.

Neither the shareholder nor the stakeholder perspective addresses all of the components of a free market system. Capitalism needs both shareholders and stakeholders, and it does no good to hang the entire system on the interests of one group. No group is greater than or less than another. Absent any one of them, things break down at every level. In my estimation, too much time and effort has been put into dividing the interests of groups within a capitalist system, and this has obscured the more fundamental reality of the human person at the heart of business. Whether one is a manager, employee, customer, supplier, or financier, each of us has motivations beyond our work. The work of capitalism is but a means for achieving each of our personal goals. Capitalism is only as good as the individual actions taken by each person every day at every moment.

To conclude, I will say that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the shareholder theory of a corporation, but it has been wrongly blamed for short-term planning, low wages, cronyism, and other problems. These are the necessary effects of neither capitalism nor

*Nicholas Spinelli*

shareholder theory. Rather, they are the consequences of poor management. Shareholder theory is not to blame for greed, but it does suffer when executives corrupt it in the name of maximizing shareholder wealth. The stakeholder theory of a corporation has its problems too, but it is a valuable challenge to the status quo that helps illuminate the importance of all who operate in the system. This is important because capitalism is only as good as the morals of the people who operate within it. Capitalism works because free individuals permit each person to do what he or she determines is best through a system of voluntary exchange that increases the benefit of all.



# Causes, Catechism, and Creation: The Aristotelian Tradition and the Human Person in Austrian Economics

*Serena Viti\**

**I**N *THE FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN AUSTRIAN ECONOMICS*, Israel Kirzner describes perhaps the most basic tenet of the Austrian school of thought: “Economic explanations rely on human purposive action.”<sup>1</sup> In the twentieth century, ample discourse in economics concerned the tension between individual, intentional human action and constrained optimization. Against the backdrop of a Baconian science that favors a reductive view of the individual in economic modeling, the role of the person in Austrian economics has become ever more important. Austrian economics challenges the traditional twentieth-century approach to microeconomics because in it, human nature is ordered to inquiry, and purpose, creativity, and discovery motivate human actions.

In this paper I propose a new lens for understanding Kirzner’s view of entrepreneurship – one that explores the impact of the creative nature of man and his final purpose. I begin with an analysis of Aristotle’s four causes vis-à-vis Austrian economics and a discussion of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. As described in the *Catechism*, man is called to participate in creation, paralleling the Kirznerian concept of alertness. I investigate this next. Insofar as Kirzner takes alertness

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<sup>1</sup> Israel Kirzner, “On the Method of Austrian Economics,” *The Foundations of Modern Austrian Economics* (1976), available at <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/104>.

to be a natural human propensity, he implies that it is written in man's nature to be attuned to and realize new opportunities to create. Creativity is the missing element in traditional economic theory, Kirzner argues, and with this shared emphasis on the creative nature of man, Austrian economics is in continuity with the Aristotelian tradition taken up by the Church. While Austrian economics is not predicated upon an expressly Catholic view of human nature, because of its emphasis on the role of the human person, Austrian economics has more affinity with Catholic social thought than mainstream economics does.

#### *Aristotle's Four Causes*

In his *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, Aristotle explains what he refers to as "causes," or the principles that help us to understand things in the natural world and the changes that take place among them. The objective of expounding causes is knowledge, because "men do not think they know a thing till they have grasped the 'why' of it."<sup>2</sup> The study of causes, therefore, is significant to any intellectual pursuit, particularly in the sciences, and Aristotle notes that it is imperative "in order that, knowing their principles, we may try to refer to these principles each of our problems."<sup>3</sup> Economics and its associated problems are included in this endeavor.

Aristotle establishes that a thing is accounted for in terms of four causes: the material cause, the formal cause, the efficient cause, and the final cause. The material cause is "that out of which a thing comes to be and which persists"<sup>4</sup> or, in other words, the physical matter of which a thing is composed. The material cause is grasped through the bodily senses (seeing, touching, and so on). In the case of a table, for example, the material cause includes the wood and nails used to construct it.

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* 2.3, 19-20.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 24.

Aristotle describes the formal cause as “the form or the archetype”<sup>5</sup> of the thing, its essence. The formal cause is more abstract than the material; it is the structure or design that makes a thing uniquely what it is. The shape, or form, of an object along with its essential qualities can be likened to a blueprint. In the case of a table, again, the formal cause would be the assemblage of legs and a flat surface that make it both functional as a table and the particular table that it is.

The efficient cause is “the primary source of change or coming to rest”<sup>6</sup> of an object, or how a thing has come into being. It is what causes a thing to exist in the first place, and it entails the knowledge and ability necessary for creating that thing. Aristotle describes it as “generally what makes of what is made and what causes change of what is changed.”<sup>7</sup> The efficient cause of a table would be the carpenter who produced the work but also, and arguably more important, his knowledge and ability to create it; in other words, the acting carpenter and his expertise. We may note that efficient causality is key to developing Aristotle’s teleological view of the world, in which everything exists for the sake of some good and has a creator. This point brings us to the final cause.

Aristotle describes the final cause as “the sense of end or ‘that for the sake of which’ a thing is done.”<sup>8</sup> It indicates the goal or *telos* of the thing, and it answers the question “For what purpose does this exist?” The final cause indicates the reason for an object, and it is why the thing’s efficient cause acted in the first place. Aristotle’s final cause supplies an understanding of things that includes their ultimate purposes. The final cause of the table, for example, is to make possible certain activities, such as dining, drafting, performing surgery, and so on, that naturally require broad and flat surfaces. Our knowledge of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 32.

the table is incomplete until we grasp what end it serves, which is another way of speaking of its final cause.

Relating Aristotle's causes to Austrian economics, particularly Kirzner's theory of entrepreneurship, we may reflect on how the causes provide insight into the human person in the science of economics. We may describe the four causes of a Kirznerian entrepreneur as follows: the material cause is the human body; the formal cause is the person's creative nature; the efficient cause is the person's knowledge and ability to create, the entrepreneurial element; and the final cause is the person's drive to produce. The formal and final causes are most significant here because they relate, respectively, to the nature of man and his purpose. Kirzner's economic theory offers a more complete scientific account through these causes; he acknowledges man's created design and the uniqueness of each being, and he asks the ultimate question: For what purpose does man act, economically or otherwise? Kirzner considers the innate creative propensity of the human person, which he calls "alertness," and emphasizes that all economic activity hinges on purposive human action. I expand on these ideas below.

#### *Man's Call to Participate in Creation*

Having laid out Aristotle's four causes and analyzed them in the context of Austrian economics, let us now consider the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Recalling that the objective of this paper is to develop a new lens for understanding Kirznerian entrepreneurship, we may see that the parallel between Kirzner's theory and Catholic social teaching flows naturally from the ideas of final and formal causality.

The *Catechism* affirms that man's end is to share in the life of God, his Creator. The creative drive of the human person, or his final cause in the Kirznerian sense, is revealed through his own creation, and made known through reason and love. The *Catechism* explains: Of all visible creatures only man is "able to know and love his creator." He is "the

only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake,” and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity.<sup>9</sup>

To share in “God’s own life” is to have a call to participate in creation. As a created being, man is drawn to this mystery and desires to collaborate in order to understand himself and his Creator. The *Catechism* stresses that creativity is the purpose of man, himself the handiwork of a Creator, through which he experiences the profound dignity with which he is endowed. “For this end” was man made: to share in the life of the Creator, to participate in creation, and to experience his fullest dignity.

Through its discussion of creativity, the *Catechism* reveals an important similarity between Austrian economics and the Aristotelian philosophy of the Church. Creative human action is the missing element in traditional economic theory, Kirzner argues,<sup>10</sup> and this common emphasis on the creative nature of man may lead one to conclude that “the human person sharing in God’s creative life” and “the Kirznerian entrepreneur” are two ways of saying the same thing. Sharing in God’s life by participating in the market process – creating value in the world through entrepreneurship – is a profound and novel vision of the individual’s role in economics.

Like final causality, the continuity between Kirzner’s theory and Catholic social teaching is evident through formal causality. In the Catholic tradition, the *Catechism* and other sources describe the formal cause of man, which gives all people their unique essence, as the soul. As an ensouled being, man is a composite of his material and spiritual dimensions. This unique and unified nature is explained in the *Catechism*: “The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the ‘form’ of the body: i.e., it is because of its

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<sup>9</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 356.

<sup>10</sup> Israel Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship*, ed. Peter J. Boettke and Frédéric E. Sautet (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2013), 28.

spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.”<sup>11</sup> United in a single nature with the body, the soul – the “form” of the body – animates the human person, making possible all of our life activities. The greatest of these life activities, as noted earlier, is to share in the life of the Creator; thus it is the soul that draws man to participate in creation.

As man’s ensouled nature predisposes him to creativity, here we find another parallel to Kirzner’s theory of entrepreneurship. The Kirznerian concept of alertness is itself described as a human propensity<sup>12</sup> – implying that it is part of man’s very nature to be open to discovery. Kirzner coins the term “alertness” to refer to the creativity and adaptivity of entrepreneurs in the market process. Therefore, to say a human person is ensouled and endowed with longing to create parallels saying a Kirznerian entrepreneur is alert and endowed with the propensity for discovery. Much like the Aristotelian tradition that has informed Catholic social teaching, Austrian economics affirms the creative nature and purpose of man.

#### *The Optimizer in Twentieth-century Economics*

Austrian economics, particularly Kirzner’s theory of entrepreneurship, offers a perspective that is quite different from that of the traditional twentieth-century microeconomic model. The latter excludes formal and final causality and focuses only on material and efficient causes. The nature and ends of man are disregarded, while his physical being, desires, and preferences are given priority under the standard model. Teleology, or the study of ends, is no longer relevant in neoclassical economics and has been replaced by attempts at a

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<sup>11</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 365.

<sup>12</sup> Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship*, 27.

positivist, mathematical account of human behavior, known as the optimization model.

But the optimization model is problematic because, given man's creative nature and purpose, "a market consisting exclusively of economizing, maximizing individuals does not generate the market process we seek to understand."<sup>13</sup> The standard study of economizing, or seeking maximum efficiency, fails to explain the coordination of supply and demand; on the other hand, Kirzner argues entrepreneurship is the missing element. The common "economic problem" of constrained optimization – to obtain the most goods within a limited number of resources – fails to appreciate how the human person is the dynamic and generative force that the market requires for sustainable value creation.

#### *Aristotelian Roots of Austrian Economics*

In *Competition and Entrepreneurship*, Kirzner criticizes the shortcomings of neoclassical economic theory insofar as it entails a completely static model of the economy. He argues that "the dominant [price] theory, by emphasizing certain features of the market to the exclusion of others, has constructed a mental picture of the market that has virtually left out a number of elements that are of critical importance to a full understanding of its operation."<sup>14</sup> Because neoclassical value theory considers only the productive factors already in the market, this model is unable to explain the newness of discovery, which is an important and observable fact in the economy. Such models exclude what Kirzner argues is the most dynamic and forceful source of economic change: the entrepreneurial element of human action. "It is this entrepreneurial element that is responsible for our understanding of human action as active, creative, and human rather

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3.

than as passive, automatic, and mechanical.”<sup>15</sup> The entrepreneurial element explains how individuals become agents of social change, in stark contrast to the reductive view of the person under the optimization model. He suggests modeling the economy as a complex, adaptive system of order amid chaos, and he brings the nature of the human person to the forefront. In this way, Kirzner’s entrepreneurial element – our nature as alert, creative, and able to facilitate change – may be considered an important application of the formal cause of man.

*Alertness, Purpose, and Discovery*

Kirzner expands on the importance of human action in the market process, and the human actor is consequently redefined. The evolution of the individual in the market process lends itself nicely to the application of Aristotle’s final cause, as it establishes a new end for the human person in Austrian economics. The principal agent in the economy is no longer *homo economicus* or the maximizing individual of neoclassical economic theory; instead, he is the alert and entrepreneurial human person.

This new actor, *homo agens*, uses human action to “make himself ‘better off’”<sup>16</sup> rather than remaining confined to an established set of economic resources, to a “framework of *given* ends and means”<sup>17</sup> within the standard economic model. The *homo agens* “is endowed not only with the propensity to pursue goals efficiently, once ends and means are clearly identified, but also with the drive and alertness needed to identify which ends to strive for and which means are available.”<sup>18</sup> Importantly, alertness may identify heretofore unknown goals and the resources to meet them. Kirzner’s entrepreneurial element thus opens

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 27.

new possibilities for human action because the function or end of the individual in the economic order has shifted: the human person no longer maximizes alone, but through “active, creative, and human”<sup>19</sup> action attempts to change his circumstances, produce, and become better off. Therefore, insofar as human action is a source of spontaneity and change in the market process, we may also speak of this element of Kirzner’s entrepreneurial theory in terms of final causality – drawing out the end of man to be creative, dynamic, and ultimately more human.

The *homo agens* who is called to participate in the market process through his creativity and discovery is a worthy rival to scarcity as the first principle of economics. Within a framework of purposeful human action, the most pertinent question in economics is no longer “What is the perfect allocation of resources to reach equilibrium?” Rather, with the inclusion of the entrepreneurial element, the question becomes “What is the ideal coordination of individual actions to spur the flourishing of the human person and creativity?” With this shift, it is evident that the neoclassical and Christian understanding of the *telos* of man, his purpose and creative end, is present in Kirzner’s theory of entrepreneurship. In many ways Kirzner’s new theory of entrepreneurship offers a view of economics as anything but a “dismal science.”

### *Conclusion*

To end as I began, I will reiterate Kirzner’s words: Economics is driven by purposive human action. Considering the lens through which we have explored Kirzner’s theory of entrepreneurship, purposive human action takes on new meaning. The creative nature and end of man in Austrian economics is in continuity with the understanding of human nature that has developed in the Aristotelian

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 28.

tradition, particularly in the teaching of the Catholic Church. Because of its emphasis on the human person and creative action, Austrian economics is more aligned with Catholic social teaching than traditional neoclassical economics might be.

Kirznerian alertness has vast implications for contemporary economic discourse concerning scarcity, value creation, and broader human flourishing. One may speculate further that, given its continuity with Austrian economics, the Aristotelian tradition may also offer fruitful insights into the role of freedom and virtue in the economy. At the very least, these are part of the moral conditions that support a society of persons in their exercise of creativity for the sake of flourishing. I would thus argue that this is a good launching point for continued study of the Aristotelian tradition vis-à-vis Austrian economics.

# The Temporal Economy and Salvation

*Jacob Mazur-Batistoni\**

**I**N HIS ENCYCLICAL *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO* Pope Pius XI states, “[N]o one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist.”<sup>1</sup> But Jesus said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.”<sup>2</sup> So why should a pope comment on matters of the temporal economy, when it is the business of the Church to prepare people for their eternal salvation? One way of answering that question is to note that, in response to socialism, the Church does not propose an alternate economic theory but instead gives a set of guiding principles that are essential to a Catholic anthropology, including the idea that eternal salvation is the ultimate end of all human beings.<sup>3</sup> Because economics concerns human relationships, it must be grounded in an understanding of human nature that accords with Catholic social teaching, without which it veers into falsehood. The Church opposes economic theories, like socialism, that fail to acknowledge that the human person is intended for communion with God.

In this paper, I will develop the idea that salvation is connected to economics, not as the *telos* of the economy but as the *telos* of the human person – the very subject that the economy concerns. Furthermore, I will reflect on how a Catholic anthropology informs persons to cooperate with Christ in his salvific work through their participation in the economy. I will draw on key ideas, including the right to private property and the inherent dignity of work, particularly as they are expounded by St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John Paul II.

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<sup>1</sup> *Quadragesimo anno*, 120.

<sup>2</sup> Jn 18:26.

<sup>3</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 43.

*The Temporal Economy and Salvation**What I Mean by the “Economy”*

First, I want to define my use of the word “economy,” to set the stage for the role that salvation plays in economics. In my usage, the economy is the management, production, and consumption of resources, intended to ensure the material and social flourishing of man. The problems an economy seeks to address are the scarcity of resources and how those resources should move from person to person. This paper is not an analysis of different economic systems but, rather, an exploration of how salvation interacts with the economy from a broad view. Human persons are always the subject of the economy, and so an economy should be judged not merely by the material benefits it provides but by the total effect it has on human flourishing. Insofar as the Catholic Church teaches that eternal salvation is the completion of human flourishing, an economy that promotes this end harmonizes well with the aims of the Church. Conversely, an economy that detracts from human flourishing stands in opposition to the Church.

*Salvation for Communion with God*

The Catholic Church teaches that the end of man is eternal communion with God. Communion with God is what elevates persons to be like Christ and thereby what fulfills them. Unsurprisingly, this eternal destination of man is usually not a consideration in economic discussions.

Salvation means not simply the forgiveness of sins, but the forgiveness of sins so that man may be brought into a transforming relationship with God. St. Athanasius captures well the way that man is transformed in this relationship: God “was made man that we might

be made God.”<sup>4</sup> This exchange is often called “deification,” and it is key to the Church’s understanding of salvation. Our communion with God is such that in gazing upon God we become like him, going “from one degree of glory to another.”<sup>5</sup> We were made for intimate union with God, and as St. Irenaeus once said, “It was for this end that the Word of God was made man.”<sup>6</sup> Deification as the purpose of salvation is the lofty goal that God made us for and should color all aspects of our life, including economics.

A deficient anthropology will give rise to a deficient economic theory. Since the Church teaches that salvation is man’s proper end, a good Catholic ought to subscribe to an economic theory that is compatible with that view. Economic activity alone does not constitute human flourishing, but it necessarily affects the conditions of such flourishing. In this sense economic affairs are included in the business of the Church.

#### *Economic Activity and the Divine Economy*

Salvation must be understood as the ultimate end of all economic action because it is the end of the human person. Among the most important principles relevant to economic activity are the right to private property and the inherent dignity of work. These foundational principles help men and women progress toward their end, by opening up possibilities for being coworkers with Christ.

The Catholic Church considers private property a natural human right, and the use of property plays a significant role in promoting the salvation of individuals. In the *Summa theologiae* St. Thomas Aquinas covers the question of property in two articles: First he asks, “[I]s the

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<sup>4</sup> St. Athanasius, “On the Incarnation of the Word,” available at <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2802.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor 3:18.

<sup>6</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.19.1; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 448.

possession of exterior things natural to man?”<sup>7</sup> The answer is both yes and no: yes, in regard to man’s use of a thing, for “by his reason and will he can make use of exterior things for his own advantage as things made for his sake”;<sup>8</sup> no, in regard to the nature of the exterior thing, for a nature is “not subject to human power, but only to the power of God.”<sup>9</sup>

In the second article on private property Aquinas asks, “[C]an man possess a thing as his own?”<sup>10</sup> He responds by stating that there are two ways a man can possess a thing as his own. The first is by the power to manage, which can be broken down into three reasons: (1) “each individual is more solicitous about taking care of something that belongs to him”; (2) “human affairs are conducted in a more orderly way”; and (3) “a more peaceful condition is preserved.”<sup>11</sup> The second way a man can possess something is by the power to use. Here Aquinas writes, “[A] man should hold his exterior things not as his own but as common, viz., in order that he might freely share them when others are in need.”<sup>12</sup> The power to manage concerns the most effective way to ensure the care of goods, while the power to use focuses on the way to apply goods that are managed. Aquinas states that man can use the goods but must see them “as common,” which implies a need for generosity. If man uses his property only for personal gain, he denies people in need the goods that are meant for them. Aquinas further explains that private property is not “a matter of the natural right but rather of human agreement.”<sup>13</sup> The nature of the exterior thing is not under man’s control, and so exterior things are made for the common good of humanity. It is natural for man to possess, manage, and use

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<sup>7</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 66, a. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 66, a. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

exterior goods. The right to private property is the soil for virtue to be cultivated and exercised and is thus an important factor promoting human cooperation with God's grace.

We may further reflect on property as private and common vis-à-vis the issue of salvation. Christ taught that on judgment day he would say to the damned, "I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, I was naked and you did not clothe Me, I was sick and in prison and you did not visit Me."<sup>14</sup> His command to aid the needy in all these ways presupposes the reality of private property. Furthermore, we see how resources should be used for the common good. Every bit of property need not be given away, but what a person possesses should be used for the benefit of all. A person can invest private property to benefit an economy, allowing others to earn a living and for goods to be purchased. For example, when a small business owner hired me for a summer to sell smoked dog bones I was given a source of income that allowed me to purchase food, drink, and shelter (rent).<sup>15</sup> My needs were provided for because of this opportunity to work. A person put his private property into a business that not only benefited him but also contributed to the common good, which includes me and the customers (and their dogs). Following the words of Christ, an investment of property such as this has implications for eternal salvation. Because this investment contributes to the economy, the individuals who participate in the economy have their needs met in a way similar yet distinct from almsgiving.

Christ makes an important distinction regarding almsgiving. The widow gave only two coins of little value, and yet she gave her property. Christ did not rebuke those in the temple and say that they should renounce their own property so that she would have a greater share of the wealth; rather, he directly praised her great act of sacrifice.

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<sup>14</sup> Mt 25:41-43.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.psbones.com/#/>.

He praised the widow for how she used her property.<sup>16</sup> It is good for us to own things, for only then can we choose to give of ourselves, even if our gift must be small. Everyone who owns property has at least “two coins” to offer his fellowman. Clearly property is important, for one cannot give alms without having alms to give. Private property allows a person to be a virtuous steward, in either the management or the distribution of goods. In both ways we can cooperate with Christ’s salvific work.

In addition to the right to private property, the inherent dignity of work is another important principle. John Paul II explains in the encyclical *Laborem exercens* that Christ’s teaching “was also ‘the gospel of work’, because he who proclaimed it was himself a man of work.”<sup>17</sup> Christ reveals labor to be dignified by his life as a carpenter. Thus, work is not only natural but also a fully human aspect of life, for Christ is surely the most perfect human among us. Christ’s example amplifies the dignity of work even further, as John Paul II comments: “[B]y enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified with us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity.”<sup>18</sup> Salvation has been incorporated with human toil, and through Christ the economic efforts of man may help to redeem humanity.

With his private property and by working to provide for himself and others, a person may cooperate with God’s redemptive work by participation in the economy. His private property allows man to use his resources to exercise virtue by giving alms and contributing to society in other meaningful ways. Through his hard work the laborer may unite his efforts with Christ’s toil for salvation – and through such work participate in Christ’s redemptive love. Economic activity can thus be a means for uniting ourselves with Christ’s salvific mission.

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<sup>16</sup> Mk 12:41-44.

<sup>17</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

*Jacob Mazur-Batistoni*

*A Temporal Economy Opposed to Eternal Life*

I will now consider how the Catholic Church has critiqued both socialism and communism as economic systems. As quoted above, Pius XI specifically points to socialism as incompatible with Catholic social teaching. But what exactly is socialism? In its most basic form, it is an economic and political system in which a national government controls much of the economy. It is often sold as the best means for bringing about a more just and equal society. In practice the details of socialist regimes vary from place to place, but the Catholic Church has maintained that, regardless of its particular “expression,” socialism is always and everywhere incompatible with her teaching. This is because, among other things, socialist tenets include the common possession of goods and the leveling of wages, as well as the fact that the movement is rooted in a materialist ideology that excludes the spiritual domain.

John Paul II’s opposition to socialism was primarily due to its materialist foundation. Materialism necessarily denies the supernatural end that is man’s communion with God. When addressing the consumerist society that opposes Marxism, the pope observed that “it seeks to defeat Marxism on the level of pure materialism by showing how a free-market society can achieve a greater satisfaction of material human needs than Communism, while equally excluding spiritual values.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the materialist view of human nature does not acknowledge man as made in the image of God or the fallenness of sin that is overcome by salvation. It rejects man’s transcendence and denies the right to private property and thus the intrinsic dignity of work. These are the reasons why one cannot be a socialist and good Catholic.

By indulging in naive optimism regarding what man can achieve through his own efforts and without the aid of grace, socialists fail to see how high God calls humanity through his salvific work. Socialists

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<sup>19</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 20.

view the problems of this world as owing to failed political systems, not to the sinfulness of individual people. In response, John Paul II commented,

When people think that they possess the secret of a perfect organization which makes evil impossible, they think that they can use any means . . . in order to bring that organization into being. Politics then becomes a “secular religion” which operates under the illusion of creating a paradise in this world.<sup>20</sup>

Socialists envision a temporal paradise, but any system they construct fails to recognize our heavenly end and our inability to get there without God’s grace. God loves us as imperfect beings who are incapable of being like him on our own. But socialism presupposes a present Godlikeness on our part, which undermines both the splendor of God’s creation and the intended end of humanity – to become like God. This eliminates the need for Christ as our savior and makes the eschaton, the now and not yet, simply the now. The significance of human life is confined to this world, and the best one may hope for in the future is some material improvement of the conditions of life brought about by a more perfect political and economic system.

Socialism attempts to create this paradise by eliminating private property, which is taken to be the cause of corruption in the world. Chesterton noted comically: “[T]he point about Communism is that it only reforms the pickpocket by forbidding pockets.”<sup>21</sup> The socialist sees a problem with the existence of pockets (private property) instead of with the person who is taking what is not rightfully his (the pickpocket). This approach is fundamentally flawed. Recalling Aquinas, we understand that private property should be considered common but not held in common. But socialists seek to take goods

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>21</sup> G. K. Chesterton, “The Beginning of the Quarrel,” in *The Outline of Sanity* (London: The Royal Literary Fund, 1926), 2.

out of the hands of people who can put these goods to use according to their own judgment. The problem is that eliminating private property not only impedes effective management of resources but also makes it impossible for a person to give freely of his own goodwill to others. The socialist offers a solution that solves nothing and in fact inhibits man from cooperating with Christ's promise of salvation.

Socialism does not view labor as having inherent dignity. During the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution, Karl Marx posited that labor is not dignified but rather alienating for man. He stated that "the worker becomes a slave to [the] objects"<sup>22</sup> that he produces. As a mindless part of production for the material gain of another, he is alienated from his products, for he is subordinated to the product instead of the product being subordinated to him. This is contrary to man's nature, and thus man is alienated from his product. From this alienation follows the alienation of work, meaning that the work man does "is not part of his nature."<sup>23</sup> For Marx, this work is not only toilsome but also without benefit for the worker because he is alienated by it. Man, therefore, is alienated from himself and his fellow man, and labor lacks all dignity. Contrast this to the way John Paul II elaborated on the dignity of work as revealed through Christ's life. The pope also responded directly to the question of alienation in his early writings. In his essay "Participation or Alienation?" the young Karol Wojtyła explained that participation is "the property by virtue of which we as persons exist and act together with others, while not ceasing to fulfill ourselves in action, in our own acts."<sup>24</sup> This means that our products do not alienate human persons from one another; rather, our actions in the world are the way we collaborate and exchange goods with

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<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx, "Alienated Labor," in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts and Society*, ed. Lloyd Easton and Kurt Guddat (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), 289.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Person and Community: Selected Essays* (New York: P. Lang, 1993), 200.

others. For Wojtyła, the idea of alienation is not without merit, but “[t]ransposing the problem of alienation to the sphere of human products and structures may even contribute to its development.”<sup>25</sup> Returning to personal relationships is the key to overcoming alienation, and man’s work can be dignified as it is a means for his participation in the lives of others. The error of socialism lies in the fact that it emphasizes systems and products, not the persons who constitute a society. It is no mystery that socialism would reject the transcendent end of man when it does not begin with an appreciation of the interpersonal and relational nature of man.

Pius XI is justified in his claim that a person cannot be a good Catholic and true socialist. Man’s end is not this-worldly but transcendent and eternal. The ability to possess and use goods is essential to the perfection of human virtue through sacrificial giving and other interpersonal actions. Furthermore, all work is dignified by virtue of Christ’s own labor and the way it allows for our participation in one another’s lives. The Catholic Church is primarily concerned not with the economic well-being of society but with promoting the good of the human person (although a healthy economy is important to a person’s good). This has been the priority of the Church from the beginning. The ultimate end of man must be kept in sight, otherwise the rights of the person that follow from the fact that he is an image-bearer of God will be violated.

#### *A Catholic Response*

How should a Catholic act in the temporal economy? With great care – not placing the material needs of man over the spiritual, and always honoring the dignity of the human person. The temporal economy is not the primary or direct path to man’s eternal salvation, but it does have a role to play in supporting human flourishing. As a

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<sup>25</sup> John Paul II, *Person and Community*, 206.

system of human relationships, the economy ought to promote human dignity and the achievement of our heavenly end. Just as a doctor can practice medicine in a way that is destructive of the human person (say, assisted suicide) or constructive (say, Mother Teresa's hospice care), so too can one promote or detract from what is good for human persons through economic activity. To the extent that all people, not just economists, are relevant actors in the economy, all have a duty to promote human flourishing in this sphere by considering above all how economics supports the human person who is destined for eternal salvation.