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## Foreword

**A**CADEMIC YEAR 2021-22 was a blessing to all of us, as it was the first post-pandemic cohort. We were able to meet in person for our first Colloquium in October 2021, meet virtually in February 2022, and then be together for a week in Rome in May. These personal engagements allowed us to find again the fundamental purpose of the Fellowship, which is to create a community of fellows who travel together, exchange ideas, discuss texts, share meals and experiences and—we hope!—forge bonds that continue throughout their lives.

The fellows took full advantage of the in-person travels and discussions, and this volume is evidence of the great intellectual motivation and curiosity that stemmed from our interactions. Many of the essays herein reflect on key social topics, such as elder care, the family, and the notion of identity. The essays are divided into four sections: (a) business and labor, (b) institutions and policy, (c) God and man, and (d) applying Catholic social thought.

I thank the fellows for their work represented here, as well as for keeping a high level of discussion throughout the year. Several questions were very disputed, and many fellows told us they profited greatly from the intellectual freedom that the Fellowship gave them. We are happy to have provided that platform—and by that token, what you read here represents the fellows' own unvarnished thoughts, not necessarily the opinions of the Fellowship itself or of the Ciocca Center.

My profound thanks as well to Rebecca Teti for supervising the fellows in the production of this volume, as well as to Candace Mottice, our fellowship manager, and 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

# Money, Retirement, and Holiness: The Morality of Investing in 401(k)s

*Jack Power\**

JESUS CHRIST CALLS US to “be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”<sup>1</sup> However, we do not live in a perfect world. The opposite, in fact, is true: our world is fallen and sinful. And in a sinful world, it can be difficult to discern which choices are moral. Consider just one field where this is so: financial markets. People can invest in companies around the globe, in various sectors of the economy, with diverse supply chains and labor inputs. Such investments may bring the good of material security, but may do so in a way that promotes immoral activities. How can one navigate this complex web of finance in the way that God calls us to? Or should we even navigate it at all?

One specific aspect of financial markets has garnered attention recently: the morality of investing in 401(k)s for retirement. There are some who contend that investing in 401(k)s is immoral. For example, Jacob Imam in “The Case Against Blind Investing” argues that investing in a 401(k) is a type of blind investing and that blind investing is immoral.<sup>2</sup> He was explicit in this position in an interview with Catholic commentator Matt Fradd. When Fradd directly asked Imam if anyone who is invested in a 401(k) is sinning, Imam replied, “Yes.”<sup>3</sup> Imam even debated Catholic apologist Trent Horn on this subject,

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:48.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Imam, “The Case Against Blind Investing,” NEWPOLITY, <https://newpolity.com/blog/against-blind-investing>.

<sup>3</sup> Pints With Aquinas, *Is It DANGEROUS for Catholics to Have a 401K? W/ Jacob Imam*, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37cE\\_GeRQTg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37cE_GeRQTg).

arguing that it is generally immoral to invest in 401(k)s for retirement.<sup>4</sup> Imam's main argument can be summarized like this: (1) investing in a 401(k) is remote material cooperation with evil because some of the companies receiving these funds conduct sinful activities; (2) remote material cooperation is morally permissible only when there is a grave reason to carry out the activity, but there is not a grave reason to do so because money used to invest is money in excess by definition; (3) therefore, investing in 401(k)s is not morally justified.

In this paper, I argue that to the contrary, it is morally permissible for Catholics to invest in 401(k)s for retirement, and this for three reasons. First, investing itself can be a morally good action. Therefore, even if there are bad effects from investing, it is justifiable under certain circumstances. Second, investing helps build up the economy and societal goods. Finally, investing for retirement is a prudent decision for retirees. I conclude my paper encouraging people to strive for holiness in all of their daily activities, including their investments.

Before examining the morality of investing in 401(k)s for retirement, let's establish some understanding of how 401(k)s work. A 401(k) is a "company-sponsored retirement account [in which] employees can contribute income, while employers may match contributions."<sup>5</sup> Generally, the employer has a set of investment plans to choose from and the employee can decide to which retirement plan to contribute.<sup>6</sup> Each plan offers a way for employees to invest in financial markets, and each plan often includes an assortment of stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and target-date funds.<sup>7</sup> The employer will then match the employee's contribution up to a certain percentage of

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<sup>4</sup> Pints With Aquinas, *Is It Generally Immoral to Invest in 401k's for Retirement?* W/ Jacob Imam Vs Trent Horn, 2022,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icoHGm2Qt68>.

<sup>5</sup> "401(k) Plan: How It Works and Its Limits," Investopedia, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/1/401kplan.asp>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

their salary, provided that the contribution is within limits set by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).<sup>8</sup> Investing in a 401(k) is an indirect investment in different shares of publicly-traded companies. For example, if an employer offers a plan for investing in a mutual fund that tracks the S&P 500, a weighted index of the top 500 companies by market cap in the United States, that means every time employees contribute to that plan, they are indirectly financing those companies. This latter fact is one of the main reasons Imam regards investing in 401(k)s as immoral. To demonstrate his point, Imam cites many different Catholic funds, which claim to be committed to upholding Catholic social teaching in their investments, and shows how, in his view, these Catholic funds are actually invested in companies that finance operations antithetical to Catholic social teaching.<sup>9</sup>

Which brings us to our original question: is investing in 401(k)s generally immoral? I take a similar approach to that of Joseph St. Pierre in his paper on the morality of investing in mutual funds,<sup>10</sup> although I focus my discussion more on proportionality than he does. However, it is important to answer this question systematically by first understanding what it means for an action to be moral. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that the morality of any act depends on three elements: the *object* chosen, the end in view or the *intention*, and the *circumstances* of the action.<sup>11</sup> The object is the “matter of a human act” which expresses “the rational order of good and evil.”<sup>12</sup> The intention is the “movement of the will toward the end” which “is concerned with the goal of the activity.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, there are the circumstances

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> “Underlying Companies in Popular Christian Investment Portfolios,” NEWPOLITY, <https://newpolity.com/research/underlying-companies>.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph St. Pierre, “Cooperators with Evil: Questioning the Morality of Mutual Fund Investments,” Röpke-Wojtyła Fellowship Essays, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, §1750.

<sup>12</sup> CCC, §1751.

<sup>13</sup> CCC, §1752.

surrounding the action, which contribute to “increasing or diminishing the moral goodness or evil of human acts,” but which “cannot change the moral quality of acts themselves.”<sup>14</sup> In order for an act to be considered morally good, the object, the intention, and the circumstances of the act must be good.<sup>15</sup>

Let us apply these principles of moral philosophy to the act of investing in 401(k)s, beginning with the object: investing. Is investing money a good or an evil action? The answer to this question can be found in the Holy Scripture in the Parable of the Talents. You’ll recall the parable: a master entrusted three servants with stewardship of his possessions. He gave to each servant respectively five talents, two talents, and one talent. In the time allotted, the servant with five talents made five more talents and the servant with two talents made another two. Both were commended by their master for their work. The third servant, however, did not make any return on his investment, opting instead to bury his talent in the ground. The master harshly rebuked this last servant, calling him, “lazy, wicked, and useless.”<sup>16</sup>

While this parable has many layers of meaning, at least three meanings are clear from the text. First, because a talent is “a unit of coinage of high...value,”<sup>17</sup> the parable shows us that using money to make more money is not in and of itself an immoral act. This can be inferred from the text by asking a simple question: if investing is intrinsically immoral, why does Jesus encourage and commend the first two servants for investing? It is obvious, therefore, that investing, in and of itself, is not immoral. Moreover, not only is the act of financial investing not immoral, but the servant who did not invest his talents

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<sup>14</sup> CCC, §1754.

<sup>15</sup> CCC, §1760.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 24:14-30.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 18:24. “Bible Gateway Passage: Matthew 18:24 - New American Bible (Revised Edition),” Bible Gateway, 2022, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2018%3A24&version=NABRE>.



*Jack Power*

was rebuked for his inaction. This shows, secondly, that investing—under the right circumstances—can be a morally good act, not merely a morally neutral act. Finally, there is an element of work associated with investing. The number of talents that each servant was given was “determined...by [their] ability.” So, there are certain skills associated with investing that, when used, will bear fruit. This is akin to reaping the fruits of one’s labor. Further, since it is implied that investing is a responsibility, this is further demonstration that there is an aspect of labor involved in investing.

However, we should be careful not to over-interpret the text. One aspect of this parable that is not analogous to modern day financial investing is how the money was made. In the parable, the money is made through direct trade, but in our system, the money to be made in an investment fund is made through purchasing shares of publicly traded companies or purchasing a “basket” of companies. The morality of investing in these companies can be difficult to assess. On the one hand, it seems intuitively obvious that one ought not buy shares in a company whose product is intrinsically evil—internet pornography, for example. But if a company donates a small sliver of its revenue to anti-Catholic programs (Planned Parenthood, e.g.) or treats some—but only some—portion of its employees poorly, it is less clear if investment in such companies is morally evil. The Church offers us two ways of analyzing if our cooperation with evil is morally permissible, which are termed *formal* cooperation with evil and *remote material* cooperation with evil.

The word “cooperation” refers to the fact that human beings work together to achieve certain goals. Of course, the goals can be evil, or the means used to achieve certain goals can be evil. It may seem tempting to say that we must never cooperate with evil under any circumstances. As Catholic apologist Jimmy Akin notes, however, this well-intentioned attitude is impossible to carry out. For example, in buying groceries from the supermarket, the money one spends could then be spent by the employees on evil things, or the supermarket itself

may supply things that are evil.<sup>18</sup> If all cooperation with evil is itself evil, then we would never be able to buy groceries!

However, some cooperation with evil really *is* evil and must therefore always be avoided. This type of cooperation with evil is called *formal* cooperation, which is defined as “mentally assent[ing] to the act with which [one is] cooperating.”<sup>19</sup> For example, if one decided to shop at a particular supermarket not in spite of but *because* they supplied some evil products, that would constitute formal cooperation with evil. Formal cooperation with evil is always evil, because for an act to be morally good, the intentions behind it must be good, as the Catechism states. If evil intentions are present, then the moral act as a whole is rendered evil. We can apply this principle to investing in 401(k)s. If one invests in a 401(k) *because* one wants to distribute as much money as fast as possible to companies to do evil things, then in that situation, investing in a 401(k) would be wrong.

But of course most people do not invest in 401(k)s because they want to distribute money to companies involved in evil operations. People invest in 401(k)s because they want to have enough money saved for retirement, and that result may involve *remote material* cooperation with evil. Remote material cooperation with evil may be morally permissible “when one does an action that is not sinful in and of itself and where he does not endorse the evil that his action facilitates.”<sup>20</sup> Investing, as I have established with the Parable of the Talents, is not sinful in and of itself, and so long as the person investing does not endorse the evil in question, the action meets the above criteria. Investing in 401(k)s is also *remote* because it is not a direct endorsement of any particular evil activity—indeed, investors may not

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<sup>18</sup> Jimmy Akin, “Moral Investing,” Catholic Answers, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/moral-investing>.

<sup>19</sup> Jimmy Akin, “Explaining Ratzinger’s ‘Proportionate Reasons,’” Catholic Answers, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/explaining-ratzingers-proportionate-reasons>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

even know precisely what stocks are in their plans or what the day-to-day governance of those companies is. Potential retirees are not writing checks to abortionists. Instead, they are giving money to a broker, who buys shares in a basket of companies. These companies then take shareholders' money in order to grow the business and generate financial returns. None of the steps involved in investing in a 401(k) are an encouragement for companies to do evil.

There is, however, a third criterion that must be met in order for remote material cooperation with evil to be morally permissible: there must be a *proportionate* reason for doing so.<sup>21</sup> Imam uses the term “grave reason” instead of “proportionate reason.” The latter term should be used because it is the term that the Magisterium uses. A proportionate reason refers to the idea that the good effects in an action must outweigh the bad effects that come from the action: “Traditional formulations of the proportionality condition require that the value of promoting the good end outweigh the disvalue of the harmful side effect.”<sup>22</sup> Saying that a proportionate reason is necessary to justify remote material cooperation with evil is *not* a justification of consequentialism, a theory rejected by the Magisterium.<sup>23</sup> If an act is intrinsically evil, there is no “proportionate reason” to justify it. But because investing is not intrinsically evil, it may be justified, even in the face of harmful side effects, if the good end outweighs the harmful side effects.

Does a proportionate reason exist to justify investing in 401(k)s for retirement? First, it is necessary to point out that money used to invest in 401(k)s is by definition in excess, in the sense that it is not

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Alison McIntyre, “Doctrine of Double Effect,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2019 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/double-effect/>.

<sup>23</sup> *Veritatis Splendor*, §75.

spent on the absolute daily necessities of life, such as food.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, Imam is correct to point out that investing is “not necessary.”<sup>25</sup> Imam regards the alternative to investing in 401(k)s as being taken care of by one’s own children in retirement.<sup>26</sup> However, that it is not strictly necessary does not mean there is no proportionate reason to invest in 401(k)s. In fact, there are two reasons that investing in 401(k)s is proportionately justified.

First, investing in 401(k)s helps the economy and society in many different ways. Each of the companies that receive capital from these retirement accounts provide thousands of jobs for workers. These workers can use their talents to provide financially for their families and communities. Supporting these jobs, families, and communities is certainly a societal and economic good. Furthermore, even in cases where a company does something evil, rarely is this the whole of the company’s mission, and often, there is much good that the company does, too. For example, Imam is right to point out that it is wrong for companies to produce the “morning-after pill,” which is a type of abortifacient. But there are objective goods that pharmaceutical companies produce which are beneficial to society: they provide vaccinations which prevent sickness, treatment for rare diseases and cancers, medications for people to live freer lives without the ill effects of disease, and so on. Again, I stress that Imam is right to point out the evils some companies are involved in and to try to get them to stop. Nevertheless, it is disingenuous only to consider the evil that these companies are doing, because proportionate reason requires that we weigh the good effects against the bad effects. If investing in 401(k)s promotes these good effects and bad effects by giving these companies capital, we must consider both issues, not merely one or

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<sup>24</sup> Akin, “Moral Investing.”

<sup>25</sup> Imam, “The Case Against Blind Investing.”

<sup>26</sup> Pints with Aquinas, “*Is It DANGEROUS for Catholics to Have a 401K? W/ Jacob Imam.*”

the other. Moreover, sometimes it is possible to get a specific stock dropped from a portfolio rather than divesting of the entire plan.

The second reason why investing in 401(k)s is justified proportionately is because it is prudent to plan for the future. People save for retirement because they realize there will come a time in life when they will be unable to work, but nevertheless, will need to pay for living expenses. Saving for these expenses is a tall order because for myriad reasons: inflation increases prices over time, retirees do not know how much longer they will live, and there may be unexpected expenses, especially medical expenses. All of these factors show that retirees need to save a lot of money, money that can most readily be gained through investment in financial markets. Even at \$1,000,000 saved by the retirement age, retirees would only have about \$40,000 to withdraw every year.<sup>27</sup> With this reality in mind, it seems even more prudent to invest money in a 401(k), which is often matched by an employer. In other words, investing in financial markets will help prepare retirees for large retirement expenses, but investing in a 401(k) will help even more so because the employer is contributing additional money to help offset these expenses down the road. Weighed against the evils brought on by financial destitution in old age, there seems to be proportionate reason to invest in a 401(k)—even for those who choose to be taken care of by their children.

In conclusion, while I disagree with Imam's assessment of the morality of investing in 401(k)s, I admire his desire to follow the implications of Catholic social teaching wherever he thinks they lead. Moral choices are not to be taken lightly because they can either help or hinder our path to salvation. Nevertheless, investing in a 401(k) is not immoral. It is, at worst, remote material cooperation with evil, and at best, an act that builds up society and the economy and prepares

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<sup>27</sup> "How Much Do You (Really) Need to Save for Retirement?" Merrill Edge, <https://www.merrilledge.com/article/how-much-do-you-really-need-to-save-for-retirement>.

people for retirement. People can and should try to do good with their money. Investing in Catholic funds, even if Imam is right to point out that they are not perfect, is a step in the right direction. But at the same time, laypeople who invest in retirement accounts should not put the entire moral weight of global financial markets on their shoulders. It is an extremely complex world; attempting to get to the bottom of every financial rabbit-hole is certain to devolve into hysteria or the inability to act. We must not forget that God gave us our humanity. St. John Paul II's words are especially pertinent here: making an "exhaustive rational calculation [of proportionality] is not possible."<sup>28</sup> In making moral decisions, we must strive to form our conscience well and to do our best in a fallen world. Investing in 401(k)s is not contrary to this noble goal.

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<sup>28</sup> *Veritatis Splendor*, §77.

# Diabolical Thinking: Alienated Labor in Marx

*Victoria Xiao\**

IN *THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*, KARL MARX summarized communism as the abolition of private property. Conservatives argue that this violates individual freedom and the basis of economic prosperity, while leftist thinkers argue that it is only controversial because the powers-that-be wish to hold onto their own power. The two camps often talk past each other and argue in perpetual cycles that only seem to strengthen their own positions. Moreover, in the face of the undeniable, horrific historical consequences of Marxism in the last century, many on the Left have adopted the strategy of defending Marxism by appealing to a distinction between “theory” and “practice.” Even though it failed in past practice, the argument goes, the theory is still viable. These phenomena show that, despite its historical and current political influence, we are still in the middle of grappling with Marxism. In this paper, I will examine Marx’s idea of alienated labor as the basis of his theory of private property. I intend to show that this fundamental idea is diabolical, in the original meaning of that word.

In his essay “Alienated Labor,” part of the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx begins by stating private property as a “presupposition”: “We have proceeded from the presuppositions of political economy...private property, the separation of labor, capital and land.” However, he immediately also describes private property as a “fact”: “Political economy proceeds from the fact of private property. It does not explain private property.”<sup>1</sup> According to Marx, private property is both a theoretical posit and an ontological fact. This may not sound so

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<sup>1</sup> “Alienated Labor,” 1.

alarming, because all theorization must start somewhere, upon some basic, irreducible facts that are true. And private property seems to be a fact true enough; our laws protect our individual ownership of material goods. However, this is not what Marx means when he refers to private property as both a theoretical posit and an ontological fact. In Marx, private property is *first* a theoretical posit, and a fact only *by virtue of* being such a posit.

The first sign that Marx is doing something different than simply basing his theorization on evidently true and basic facts about the world is his explicit rejection of the need to elaborate on the basic concepts of political economy, which include private property. He writes: “Let us not put ourselves in a fictitious primordial state like a political economist trying to clarify things.” Such “a primordial state clarifies nothing,” he continues, but only “acknowledges as a fact or event what it should deduce.” In other words, private property and other concepts, such as capital and labor, require no clarification, not because they are clearly and self-evidently true, but because basic theoretical concepts require no clarification from a methodological perspective. I cannot overemphasize the importance of noticing the methodological—and, as I will show, ontologically divisive—statement implicit in Marx’s conception of private property. Instead of pointing to our day-to-day reality to justify taking private property as a starting point in his theory, Marx plainly says that he does not need to justify any starting point. All theorists must start somewhere, with some set of theoretical presuppositions, but all can give reasons for starting with X and not Y, and by talking through those reasons, we can change where we start. But Marx disagrees with this. While others may fail to justify their theoretical fundamentals, Marx rejects the very need to justify any fundamentals at all. Marx can only achieve this by treating presuppositions and facts as interchangeable in an ontological sense: just like facts, presuppositions are self-evident and truly existing. That is to say, Marx can only achieve this by rendering what *we take* to be real to be *truly* real. Marx’s ontology is thus baked into his



methodology. The interchangeability of fact and presupposition is a statement about reality that reflects Marx's philosophical ambition of making the objective *out of* the subjective. The very way in which Marx reasons, even before we examine what he reasons about, is but an inversion of reality, and the gateway to all the deception that is to follow.

Immediately after negating the need to explain theoretical fundamentals, Marx presents, as a true "fact": "The worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and extent."<sup>2</sup> In other words, "the object which labor produces, its product, stands opposed to it as an alien thing, as a power independent of the producer." The product of labor is the realization or objectification of labor, and the product is "the diminution of the worker." Marx goes on to state the same idea in many different ways without ever explaining *why* the fruit of one's own labor is "alien" to him and even "diminishes" him. (I suspect that this is also in fact the basis for Marx's labor theory of value: the more labor goes "out" of the worker, the more the product of his labor is "empowered.") The closest he gets is when he says that this is all true "according to this premise: The more the worker exerts himself, the more powerful becomes the alien objective world which he fashions against himself, the poorer he and his inner world become, the less there is that belongs to him."<sup>3</sup> However, this is no explanation at all. It only turns the question of why there is an antagonism between the worker and his product to why there is an antagonism between the worker and the "objective world."

Based on such "factual" statements of oppositional relationships between the worker and his product (or nature), Marx concludes: labor, the appropriation of nature, alienates man. All starts with the presupposition of a fundamental tension between worker and his own

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2.

production, a tension that is not only ontological but mythical: the worker's "production increases in power" and confronts him "as an alien thing." The alienation of labor does not only occur when a factory worker gets the rubber band that he just made taken away from him. It occurs when any production takes place at all—and I mean *any*. It is not something that takes place within a specific circumstance that everyone will agree is undesirable, but an ontological statement about how man relates to his "external reality." Alienated labor does not require an evil capitalist. An evil capitalist requires alienated labor. Marx writes: "The relationship of the rich to the objects of production" is "only a consequence" of "the relationship of the worker to the objects of his production."<sup>4</sup> In other words, how the worker relates to his own labor produces "the relation of the capitalist to labor, or whatever one wishes to call the lord of labor."<sup>5</sup> In short, alienated labor is the basis for "the relation in which he stands to these other men."<sup>6</sup> This is a most amazing point: capitalists come into being *through* alienated labor. According to the "fact" of alienated labor, man does not own his own product of labor. To whom does the ownership belong? It can't be gods, Marx argues, so therefore it must be to other men: "The alien being who owns labor and the product of labor, whom labor serves and whom the product of labor satisfies can only be man himself."<sup>7</sup> Voila! "Evil capitalists" are born.

Tellingly, Marx uses "product" and "capital" interchangeably. The more the worker produces, Marx writes, the more the worker "falls under the domination of his product, of capital."<sup>8</sup> As much as the worker falls under the "domination of his product," then, so much he falls under the domination of "capitalists," whoever they may be. The oppressive nature of capital is a derivative of man's subjugation to his

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 2.

own production, and man's subjugation to his own production is, according to Marx, a simple ontological fact. Put another way, according to Marx, the capitalist exists because the worker cannot own his product of labor, and the worker cannot own his product of labor because of an ontologically irreducible antagonism between man and the objective world. In this way, without any reference to how people relate to each other in reality, Marx derives the concept of "the capitalist" *a priori* and concludes that there is a fundamental "antagonism between man and man." Because oppression is the more fundamental ontological fact than the oppressor, communism cannot but be a never-ending fight. Since the victim comes before the culprit, absolutely anyone can be this culprit. Hence the need for perpetual "class struggle" and the ever-changing faces of the "class enemies."

Our discussion so far can shed light on why Marx refuses to explain private property—along with capital and labor—in the beginning of his essay. Private property, as the exploitative relationship between the capitalist and the worker, is a fact as much as alienated labor is a fact, which is to say, not very much a fact at all. Here, I want to point out that the way Marx sets the stage for the "fact" of alienated labor is highly tautological. He presents the "fact" of alienated labor *after* using the examples of private property, capital, and labor to argue that there is no need to explain the basic facts of political economy. But his conceptions of private property, and, more obviously, of capital and labor, are all derivatives *of* alienated labor. In Marx's own words, alienated labor is the "direct cause" of private property.<sup>9</sup> And alienated labor itself rests on an ontological division between man and reality. Not only does Marx directly speak about this division, but his very methodological approach, by virtue of obfuscating the difference between a presupposition and a fact from the beginning, also embodies this division. Both the substantive and methodological basis of Marx's

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 6.

theory is an inversion of reality, and one can try to hide this only with tautological reasoning.

Despite private property being only a derivative of alienated labor, Marx calls not for the abolishment of alienated labor, the purported cause, but for the abolishment of private property, the purported effect. For example, in “Private Property and Communism,” Marx writes that communism, as “the overcoming of private property,” is the overcoming of “*human self-alienation*” and thereby “the *genuine* resolution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man.”<sup>10</sup> Here and in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx treats the abolition of private property as the solution to the problem of human self-alienation. But, according to his own logic in “Alienated Labor,” there is no reason to expect this would work. The negation of an effect would not negate its cause.

Similarly, in “Free Human Production,” Marx contradicts himself by treating private property as the cause of alienated labor. In this piece, Marx presents a positive vision of labor, something he calls “free” production, in which we would produce things as “*human beings*” and where labor would be “a *free manifestation of life* and an *enjoyment of life*.”<sup>11</sup> Communism would be the realization of this possibility. In other words, according to Marx here, although alienated labor is a fact, it is not a necessary fact, and the only reason why we do not have free production now is private property: it is under the “presupposition of private property” that labor is “an *externalization of life*...and indubitable expression of my *self-loss* and my *powerlessness*.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, alienated labor is now not the cause of private property, but private property the cause of alienated labor. This again directly contradicts “Alienated Labor.” It seems to me that whenever

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<sup>10</sup> Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, “Private Property and Communism,” 304.

<sup>11</sup> Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, “Free Human Production,” 281.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-282.

Marx is talking about a positive vision of labor and life, he treats private property, instead of alienated labor, as the fundamental fact. However, when it comes down to the inner-connections between these basic concepts, Marx puts alienated labor—more precisely, juxtaposition between man and the objective world—*before* private property as its cause.

Why does Marx contradict himself in such a direct manner? I think this is a serious problem for Marxist scholars. Here, I will offer some preliminary remarks. First, if something *just exists*—and such a thing Marx makes the juxtaposition between man and his products of labor to be—how can anyone negate it? While the abolition of private property and the elimination of capitalists are actionable items, the negation of alienated labor is not: it *just is*. In Marxism, the problem that communism sets out to address—“*human self-alienation*”—*just is* and *always will be*. In other words, communism is impossible on a theoretical level. Marxism would stand, regardless of how many times it fails, but precisely because *it has always been futile on its own terms*. Communism is devoid of a possible positive outcome on a theoretical level, and therefore able to justify itself in the face of *anything* at all. Such is the cynical nature of its utopianism.

“Alienated labor” stems directly from Marx’s view of human existence. Towards the end of “Private Property and Communism,” Marx explicitly forbids the question of creation and writes that a “*being* only regards himself as independent when he stands on his own feet, and he stands on his own feet only when he owes his *existence* to himself.”<sup>13</sup> Owing existence to himself, rather than to the pure act of *Existence* sourced in God, man would only be able to actualize himself through *separation* from the rest of reality. Any relationships at all—interpersonal or productive—would infringe upon his independence and be oppressive for him. In other words, the idea that man’s own

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<sup>13</sup> Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, “Private Property and Communism,” 313.

products of labor stand opposed to him as some alien power is a result of Marx's view that man self-creates and self-subsists. But to oppose ourselves to nature is to slander its goodness and separate us from *Life*; it is diabolical, in the original sense of the word.

The English word "devil" comes from the Greek word διάβολος (*diabolos*), literally to "throw across." The devil is the one who separates, divides, which is to say, who accuses, slanders, and severs a relationship. The serpent in Eden divided man from God, not by making Adam and Eve want to become like gods, but by making them think that God does not want them to become like gods. That is to say, the serpent painted a picture of reality in which man's interests are fundamentally at odds with God's. Marx does the same: "The more man attributes to God, the less he retains in himself."<sup>14</sup> I don't think the story of man's Fall is primarily one of arrogance, for we can still understand arrogance via a framework of man versus God, the human versus the divine. Rather, I think man's Fall is a story of false ontology. The serpent's deceit lies not in making Adam and Eve want to become like gods, but in making them think that they are *not* becoming like gods *already* under God's providence. The ultimate choice in life is to view reality and man as harmonious or as conflictual. Both the serpent and Marx chose the latter.

We can only disagree about what is real if we agree that the question of *what is real* is worthy of pursuit. But if we reject the fundamental goodness of reality, the question of what is real (metaphysics) becomes worthless. This is why Karl Marx has to forbid questioning in "Alienated Labor" and elsewhere. Objectivity is thus entirely subjectivized via a choice made on behalf of an imagined "self" whose interests are thought of as not being accounted for by the reality that it cannot but be a part of. What can only come out of this inversion of reality is the destruction of all interpersonal relationships as well as a destitution of the material world.

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<sup>14</sup> "Alienated Labor," 2.

Victoria Xiao

In *Paradise Lost*, when the seraphim Abdiel objects to Satan's incitement of rebellion, he says to Satan, God made "Thee what thou art," and implores him to repent. But Satan's reply, demonstrating his ontological worldview, finally seals his Fall:

who saw  
 When this creation was? rememberst thou  
 Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?  
 We know no time when we were not as now;  
 Know none before us, self-begot, self-rai's'd (856-860).

As Satan declares himself to be "self-begot, self-rai's'd," despite being an angel, Abdiel no longer implores him to repent but only forecasts his destruction: "O alienate from God, O spirit accurst, / Forsak'n of all good; I see thy fall / Determined" (877-879). There is nothing more to say because Satan's error is a *choice*, a way of looking at the world. Similarly, there is not much more for Marx to explain about the fundamental tension between man and his products of labor, which is to say, the fundamental tension between man and nature. It is a choice. As Karl Marx summarizes, communism is "the abolishment of private property." In light of our discussion of alienated labor and its relation to the concept of private property, what Marx's summary of communism really means is that communism is a choice to see ourselves as self-begotten beings who win by opposing and negating nature and others, rather than as creatures whose nature is harmonious with the rest of reality and God. While we may think that there is something to gain in absolutizing ourselves against reality, there is *nothing* outside of reality, and in absolutizing ourselves in this way, we only destroy ourselves. Such is sin. According to communism, oppression could only end on the day when there is no juxtaposition between self and world, and the "fight" must go on until then. However, there *is no* such juxtaposition to begin with except in our

own mind. As much as it is groundless, as much as it is diabolical thinking.



# Man, Woman, and Work: Reclaiming Unity

*Lexi Zambito\**

“THE LORD GOD THEN TOOK THE MAN and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it.... The Lord God said: it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him.”<sup>1</sup> These words, placed at the beginning of the story of salvation history, disclose the nature of man and woman, made for one another in the image of God and called to participate in the work of creation. Almost as soon as Genesis teaches us about the origin of man and woman in the earthly paradise, it tells us of their fall: “So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”<sup>2</sup> The effects of this transgression are instantaneous: their eyes are opened, they cover their nakedness, and they hide from God in shame. When asked for an account of their sin, Adam places the blame on his companion: “The woman whom you put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it....’ The woman answered, ‘The snake tricked me, so I ate it.’”<sup>3</sup> This inaugural rebellion against God ushers in the plague of original sin, which infects man and woman’s relationship with all of creation, and especially their relationship with each other. The ages since the Fall have seen endless recapitulations of the discord that poisoned the companionship of Adam and Eve and twisted their relationship from one of trust and openness to one of division and accusation. Nevertheless, their work

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:15-18.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:6.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:12-13.

remains, no matter how heavy the burden of sin. The triumph of man and woman over the chaos of sin lies in actualizing their unity by performing the work originally entrusted to them by God, that of creating and cultivating life.

This paper will examine work as a necessary part of man's existence and especially the importance of the intransitive effects of work in marriage. The actions of husband and wife, performed with a unity of purpose, serve to unite them, while actions performed apart from one another will serve to entrench division. Procreation is the most fundamental work man and woman can perform together, followed by the education of their children and the support of their families, both through economic productivity and work in the home. This shared work serves to unite man and woman, so this is also the place where temptation and sin spread division. To reclaim what has been broken by sin, man and woman must shun the evil whisperings of the snake and turn back to the work God called them to share in the earthly paradise.

The command in Genesis 1:28 to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" serves as "the source of her [the Church's] conviction that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth."<sup>4</sup> The work given to Adam and Eve is intended to fulfill their potential as creatures made in the image and likeness of God, as this likeness entails the rationality and desire to create and cultivate. The earth in this prelapsarian state readily succumbed to man's efforts, and it is only after the Fall that God tells Adam and Eve, "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread."<sup>5</sup> Thus, work was not intended to be the backbreaking toil that man must perform as punishment for his sin.

Even though original sin renders work to be a grueling burden, the performance of work is nevertheless "for the good at once of

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

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 3:19.

man's body and soul."<sup>6</sup> Work fulfills human potential, because man is "a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization."<sup>7</sup> As "the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath," so work was made for man, not man for work. The kind of work that man does, its objective sense, shapes man, the subject, according to the demands and responsibilities associated with it.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the action and the person who performs the action are not "two separate and self-sufficient entities," but are really "a single, deeply cohesive reality."<sup>9</sup> Every action not only has an effect on the world and a set beginning and end in time, but it also has an effect on the agent who performs the action, both in the short-term, transitive sense and in the lasting, intransitive sense.<sup>10</sup> Everyone must confront the reality that the actions they perform are not merely external manifestations of their will; each person inflicts the ramifications of their actions on themselves, whether good or evil. The actions that one performs, and the manner in which he performs them, mold persons and actualize them into a particular kind of being.

In marriage, man and woman retain their independence as agents but nevertheless face the choice to consciously actualize themselves as one flesh through the work they do together. When spouses perform the duties their vocation enjoins upon them, they not only affect the world around them, but more importantly, they shape themselves and their entire conjugal communion through their decisions. Marriage is intended as a sharing of the "entire life project" that "sinks its roots in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Quadragesimo anno*, 135.

<sup>7</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1969), 149.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-1.

<sup>11</sup> *Familiaris consortio*, 19.

This natural dynamism impels them to “progress towards an ever richer union with each other on all levels—of the body, of the character, of the heart, of the intelligence and will, of the soul.”<sup>12</sup> Even when acting independently, their decisions must always be for the common good of their own small community. Certain actions shape us more than others, depending on their gravity or the responsibilities they entail. The more exacting the work, the greater the potential for fulfillment.

The most formative work that married couples can do is that which God explicitly asks of them—to be fruitful and multiply, and have dominion over the earth. In marriage, what greater way to advance toward the actualization of total unity than to create a person, as “all love ends in an incarnation”?<sup>13</sup> Procreation is the direct and unreserved response to God’s mandate to serve as co-creators with Him. This work is not limited in scope to the physical act of reproducing and bearing a child; the positive response to procreate in accordance with God’s design contains an implicit affirmative response to the continued care and nurturing of this life through mental, emotional, and spiritual formation.<sup>14</sup> The neglect of this duty would leave the work of procreation “unfinished” and “expose it to certain ruin.”<sup>15</sup> The burden of education does not fall more to one parent than to the other, but upon both of them as a joint undertaking. This shared purpose continues to strengthen the relationship of the parents, as the ongoing education of their child continuously affirms the fruitful work they began together with procreation. Marriage provides the best environment for this continuous education, as “the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Fulton Sheen, *Three to Get Married* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), 189.

<sup>14</sup> *Casti connubii*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

parents are bound together by an indissoluble bond” which allows “the care and mutual help of each” to be “always at hand.”<sup>16</sup>

When man and woman have established a family, they must continually support it through their labor. By producing goods, performing physical or intellectual labor, and harvesting food, man obeys God’s command to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. Thus, “work constitutes a foundation for the formation of *family life*,” as children learn what it means to fulfill themselves as humans through the example of their parents, and work provides for the sustenance of the family.<sup>17</sup> The positive response to the obligation to support their family further actualizes unity, as day after day the spouses labor under a single purpose, to support the common good of their family. This unity of purpose does not, however, necessitate homogeneity in action. Unity is only true unity if there are differences, which man and woman have by nature. This is what makes them complementary to one another and allows for a natural division of work in support of the family.

The father’s role in the household is analogous to Christ’s as one of headship, love, and sacrifice. This entails the fulfillment of the “sacred law of nature that a father should provide food and all necessities for those whom he has begotten.”<sup>18</sup> This is true for the very basic reason that men possess the physical strength to perform the taxing labor that yields food and other resources from the earth. While technology has lessened the physical strain required for production, the responsibility of earning a living still falls to the father, and this is because “a woman is by nature fitted for home-work, and it is that which is best adapted at once to preserve her modesty and to promote the good bringing up of children and the well-being of the family.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Rerum novarum*, 13.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 42.

This does not mean, however, that women are forbidden from making economic contributions to their families. While the locus of economic production has shifted away from the home over the course of the centuries, the economic contributions of women should still be made “primarily in the home or in its immediate vicinity.”<sup>20</sup> This allows for women to contribute to the economic welfare of the family if absolutely necessary due to the wages of her husband, while also providing her with the ability to focus on the care and education of their children. The work that mothers perform in the home has “irreplaceable value,” as they care for the physical and emotional needs of their families.<sup>21</sup> Especially when her children are young, a woman offers the gift of her body as the locus of care and sustenance. The steadfast and loving work of a mother not only supports and nourishes her family, but it also serves to educate her children in virtue and the supreme value of work performed not for a wage, but out of love for God and others.

When this natural division of labor is oriented toward the common good of the family and is pursued by man and woman as part of their shared life project, they actualize themselves as the one flesh that God calls them to be. If the joint undertaking of the work of procreation, education, and the support of their families is what unites husband and wife, then division will come through the rejection of this undertaking. Man and woman experience the temptation to either completely shun or distort the work they are called to do, as work “is being everywhere changed into an instrument of perversion.”<sup>22</sup>

Contraception poses perhaps the greatest threat to the unity of man and woman, as this practice belies a manifest and obstinate refusal to obey the divine mandate to be fruitful and multiply. The use of contraception is an affront to God and it undermines the relationship

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<sup>20</sup> *Quadragesimo anno*, 71.

<sup>21</sup> *Familiaris consortio*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Quadragesimo anno*, 135.

between man and woman at its very roots, because it is a refusal by the spouses to be collaborators in the work of creation and to be united in all that they have and are. Contraception allows the spouses to withhold the gift of life from one another and to spurn the very work that would unite them the most. John Paul II calls the conjugal act that is robbed of its procreative potentiality a lie, because it is not a complete and total self-gift of the spouses to each other.<sup>23</sup>

The complete self-gift required for procreation is also necessary for education, and so there exists here, too, the temptation toward disunity. The temptation to shirk the responsibility to educate one's children can be especially strong for fathers, who, living in certain societies and cultures, might think that their authority in the family excuses them from this duty.<sup>24</sup> If the father is materially supporting his family, he might believe that there is simply no need to be concerned with such matters, as this can be left to the mother. Needless to say, this introduces a separation in the marriage in which husband and wife do not share the work of education. While it is proper that man and woman contribute to the common good of the family in different ways according to the nature and capabilities of each, education requires the ongoing collaboration of both man and woman, as children have the need and the right to be educated by both of their parents.

The joint work of man and woman may also be threatened by the temptation to invest all of their time in a career to the neglect of their duties to their spouse and children. Work is necessary for the proper functioning of the family, but too much work done apart from the home can threaten to break its bonds. Work is meant to be subordinated to the family in service to its economic and educational needs, but often the family can instead become subordinated to work. This not only threatens the education of the children, as prolonged absences for the sake of work can deprive them of the guiding

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<sup>23</sup> *Familiaris consortio*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

influence of one or both of their parents, but it also harms the relationship of the spouses. As working continuously with one's spouse toward a shared goal unites them as one flesh, continually choosing a career to the exclusion of the family will gradually entrench division.

Man and woman face these and many more temptations as they strive to accomplish the work God has entrusted to them. God tells Adam and Eve that in return for their sin, the work they are called to do together will be rife with pain and suffering. To Eve God says, "I will intensify your toil in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."<sup>25</sup> The work of procreation will be painful for woman, and yet she will still long for the husband with whom she has a damaged relationship. To Adam God says, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, you shall not eat from it, cursed is the ground because of you! In toil you shall eat its yield all the days of your life."<sup>26</sup> Man was made to cultivate and care for the earth in cooperation with God, but now he must wrestle with the unyielding soil to support his wife and the children she has borne in pain. Despite the toil and discord that makes obedience to God more difficult, man and woman must nevertheless accomplish the work entrusted to them. The intransitive nature of every action will either entrench man and woman further in the disunity into which they fell, or it will incrementally restore that unity and dynamism for which they were created, the complementarity so intrinsic that it made Adam exclaim in joy, "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Genesis 3:16.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 3:17.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 2:23.



# Private Property and Human Flourishing

*Tony Crnkovich\**

PRIVATE PROPERTY IS FAR MORE THAN an economic question. In its deepest meaning it is an essential element for the flourishing of the human person. However, when the question of private property comes up, it is often only in the context of economic systems: to determine the most effective means for satisfying the basic needs of man and generating wealth. While it is true that private property is essential for these things, the conversation cannot remain on the merely material level. Such a vision of private property is inadequate as it fails to account for man's transcendent spiritual nature. By analyzing Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, with an assist from Thomistic thought, one sees that in addition to providing the foundation for any true and good economic system, private property enables man to thrive according to his nature. This transcendent aspect of private property will be further developed by Saint John Paul II some 90 years after *Rerum Novarum*, in his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*. Through a close reading of *Laborem Exercens*, it is readily apparent that private property is an indispensable condition for enabling man to grow in his humanity, and thus understood, achieves its fullest meaning.

That the material conditions of man touch upon and affect his eternal well-being is something noticed by all, even those who deny eternity, but who nevertheless point out the harmful spiritual effects of insufficient material means. In recent history, this is nowhere more evident than in the rise of socialism in response to a capitalistic marketplace that turned a blind eye to human dignity and reduced man to one more element in the chain of production instead of recognizing him as both its author and proper end. This deadly disease—

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socialism—was spreading rampant through the body politic after the Industrial Revolution, leading Leo XIII to write “that some opportune remedy must be found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class: for the ancient workmen’s guilds were abolished in the last century and no other protective organization took their place.”<sup>1</sup> Yet the solutions being proposed at the time by the socialists would have further entrenched man in his miserable and impoverished condition (both physically and spiritually) by denying him that which his nature needed most. It is for this reason that Leo XIII condemned the actions of “the socialists, [who] working on the poor man’s envy of the rich, are striving to do away with private property, and contend that individual possessions should become the common property of all, to be administered by the State.”<sup>2</sup> The irony of such a solution is that it “would deprive [man] 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>3</sup>

Having placed the focus of the argument around man’s relationship to property and its ability to lift men out of abject states of poverty, Leo XIII sets out to show that ownership of private property is not only something distinctly human but also in complete accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church and the natural law tradition. While Leo XIII is the first to agree that man has the elements of an animal nature and shares two main instincts with the animal kingdom, namely preservation of self and propagation of the species, he notes that such anthropology omits “reason, which is the predominant element in us who are human creatures; it is this which renders a human being human, and distinguishes him essentially from

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<sup>1</sup> *Rerum novarum*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

the brute.”<sup>4</sup> It is precisely on account of man’s rational nature that “it must be within his right to possess things not merely for temporary and momentary use, as other living things do, but to have and hold them in stable and permanent possession.”<sup>5</sup>

Private property is something distinctly human because it is distinctly rational. Animals don’t have a right to private property because they lack the ability to direct their future ways of being. Dogs don’t save food for later or create storerooms of treats for the sake of satisfying a future desire; they are only concerned with satisfying the desire at hand. In the case of squirrels, for instance, who gather acorns before the winter comes, they do so not as a result of planning for the future, since they lack reason, but in order to carry out an instinct which urges them on at the moment to gather food, without their knowing the overall purpose of such a behavior. Conversely, humans are always planning for the future and thinking of ways in which they can direct their being. A man buys land so that he may grow crops in the future. He also may purchase horses and a plow that he might make the soil bear fruit. Or perhaps he builds a warehouse or apartments. And all the while he may be dreaming of supporting a family. Because such private ownership is necessary for man’s continued survival and flourishing—that is, not only to meet his hunger and thirst, but also to exercise his imagination, his hopes, and his talents—it is paramount that his property, once acquired, not be taken away from him.

Besides making this appeal to man’s nature and his ability to direct his future existence and plan accordingly, Leo XIII also refers to the writing of St. Thomas Aquinas, who speaks for the Church when he lays out the principles of private ownership, on which private property depends, and how said property is to be properly used. This twofold teaching on property—private ownership accompanied by common

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 6.

use—is the backbone of Leo XIII’s argument vindicating private property and placing it squarely in the Catholic intellectual tradition.

In answering the question of whether it is lawful for a man to possess something as his own, Aquinas firmly responds that “it is erroneous to maintain that it is unlawful for a man to possess property.”<sup>6</sup> As a matter of fact, Thomas goes so far as to say that it “is necessary to human life,”<sup>7</sup> and subsequently gives three reasons. The first is “because every man is more careful to procure what is for himself alone than that which is common to many or to all: since each one would shirk the labor and leave to another that which concerns the community, as happens when there is a great number of servants.”<sup>8</sup> The problem Thomas points to here has elsewhere been called the tragedy of the commons. When something is held in ownership by many people, ambiguity often arises as to who is responsible for the maintenance of such property. Additionally, there can arise a willingness to exploit the resources of that property since it isn’t one’s own, and there is less concern for harming something that is not one’s own. A simple example illustrates this. Many major cities have introduced dockless bike-share programs to mitigate traffic and encourage methods of transportation supposed to be less harmful to the environment. Users can unlock them through their phones and use them for as long as they wish. As an unfortunate side-effect, many of these bikes have been damaged and left in places where they do not belong. Because there is no sense of ownership, few riders are concerned with whether or not the bike will remain in good shape for the next ride. For them, the only thing that matters is that they get to their final destination when they are riding, not that the bike last for a long time.

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II Q.66 a.2, respondeo.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

The second defense Aquinas gives for private property comes from the observation that “human affairs are conducted in more orderly fashion if each man is charged with taking care of some particular thing himself, whereas there would be confusion if everyone had to look after one thing indeterminately.”<sup>9</sup> This is a practical point, but it makes clear that private ownership ensures everyone knows what to take care of and that there is no ambiguity with regard to care for temporal things.

As if these arguments were insufficient, Aquinas’ third point concludes that a more peaceful state is ensured for everyone if each one is contented with his own. “Hence it is to be observed that quarrels arise more frequently where there is no division of things possessed.”<sup>10</sup> At some point or another, property held in common will need to be used by one person in particular. For instance, if three friends decide to purchase a car together for the sake of minimizing their individual cost, conflict would arise when two or more of them need the car at the same time. Since they all have equal ownership over the car, the only way they could settle these simultaneous and conflicting appeals would be if they were able to come to some sort of an agreement. Needless to say, the more things are held in common by an even greater number of people, the more likely are opportunities for conflict to arise. Thus, private property and ownership drastically cut the number of potential conflicts and lead to a more peaceful world, peace being one of the most important things for human flourishing.

While this teaching on private property has been widely accepted in the Church, some seek to challenge it by referring to Pope Paul VI’s more recent statement that the “right to private property is not absolute and unconditional.”<sup>11</sup> After all, the acquisition of private property for its own sake is not the purpose of human life, but rather

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *Populorum Progressio*, 22.

property must help aid man in discovering his creator. While this seems to pit Paul VI in opposition to Aquinas and Leo XIII, it is important to note that the former is emphasizing an aspect of Thomas' own thought on the issue, namely that private property must serve the common good and when it is only oriented towards individual use and well-being, it violates the natural ordering of goods.

So far in my argument, we see that Leo XIII upholds the institution of private property as not only a good thing for man, but also a fundamental right that goes along with his being a rational creature. Yet it is not enough to talk about private ownership as a fact which everyone can agree on as something economically and morally good. It is crucial that we understand how man's relation to private property affects him as a person. Man, who is always making greater and greater efforts to understand himself, must realize that private property plays an essential role in forming him as a person.

To think of private property from an abstract and purely economic standpoint is to only see part of the picture. As Leo XIII has shown in citing Aquinas, private property not only leads to greater care for material goods but also provides man an opportunity to exercise his rationality. Additionally, Saint John Paul II further fleshes out the picture in his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, showing that the possession of private property is essential for man to fulfill his vocation as *a worker*. John Paul will argue that man's first vocation is as a rational worker, and private property is essential for working, and thus private property plays a role in man's growth as a moral agent.

Beginning with the highest source of knowledge, the revealed word of God, John Paul II notes how "the Church finds in the very first pages of the book of Genesis the source of her conviction that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth."<sup>12</sup> For there, in the first lines of Scripture, one reads that God created man

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<sup>12</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 4.

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“so that he might work and watch over [the garden].”<sup>13</sup> and gave him the command to “be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth.”<sup>14</sup> Man’s first and most fundamental vocation is that of a worker who has been tasked by the Divine with carrying out work on earth: not simply any work, but work that makes man co-creators with God.<sup>15</sup> When one fully understands the gravity of these words, it is impossible to think of human labor or work merely by measuring productivity. We come to see work as an essential part of man realizing his nature. Yes, it is good that man’s work be productive and lead to great effects in society, but what is more important is that man engage in the very act of working. Thus, it would be more conducive to a person’s flourishing if he lived modestly and worked than if he were to live luxuriously but never have the chance to exercise his rationality, his freedom, his creativity, and his entrepreneurial sense of initiative. Fortunately these ideas are not opposed to each other and quite often the laborer who most fully exercises the virtues is best suited for real success in the world.

This shift from the objective sense of work to the subjective sense results from a greater appreciation of those words from Genesis. As John Paul II says, “man has to subdue the earth and dominate it, because as the ‘image of God’ he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization. As a person, man is therefore the subject of work.”<sup>16</sup> From these lines, it is clear that one could not act in a free manner with a tendency towards self-realization guided by reason without the accompanying private property. Here is one of the most important points of the encyclical:

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<sup>13</sup> Genesis 2:15. Translation my own (*Tulit ergo Dominus Deus hominem, et posuit eum in paradiso voluptatis, ut operaretur, et custodiret illum*).

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>15</sup> See Gen. 2:4-5.

<sup>16</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 6.

as a person, man carries out work regardless of the objective value being created because in doing so he realizes his human nature. Work isn't only about producing; it's about actualizing the potential in man, and private ownership plays a key role.

It is in this context that the understanding of private property takes on a new meaning. On one hand, when the focus of work is on its productive meaning, it is reasonable to understand the importance of private ownership for producing things and improving one's lot in life. On the other hand, if the subjective element of work is emphasized above the productive aspect, then private property receives a new and deeper meaning as it facilitates man's rational work and thereby enables him to thrive. John Paul II only arrives at this conclusion of the primacy of the subjective nature of work after asserting that:

the primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject. This leads immediately to a very important conclusion of an ethical nature: however true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is 'for man' and not man 'for work'. Through this conclusion one rightly comes to recognize the pre-eminence of the subjective meaning of work over the objective one.<sup>17</sup>

Thus it is that through work, "man not only transforms nature, adopting it to this own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being.'"<sup>18</sup> In work, man is able to exercise the virtues, cultivate the earth, give back to society, and provide for his family. But benevolence is only possible if man is able to accrue wealth; cultivation of the earth is only possible if one is allowed to keep the means for producing a harvest;

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 9.



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and one can only give back to society if he has been allowed to keep what he has worked for. This is why the possession of private property is so important.

Some might take issue with this last point, objecting that private property isn't truly essential for flourishing at work, and that a worker's dignity can be fully respected in a context that denies private property. The argument would be that a worker on an assembly line wouldn't need to be able to take advantage of private property to do his job well and that in fact there is no room for any autonomy since his job is naturally repetitive and doesn't allow for much freedom. While it is true that this scenario is quite different from the farmer or craftsman who needs to purchase his own tools, land, and materials to carry out his profession, it is still the case that private property plays an essential role in the life of the factory worker who only needs to show up to work with his lunch pail, everything else being provided for.

That this is the case can be understood in two ways. The first is that although not everyone in any given enterprise has ownership of the means to labor, the individual workers can be seen as an extension of the factory owner whose right to private property enables him to develop a business that gives others an opportunity to work and produce objectively good items for the rest of society. Without the business owner's right to private property, many workers would lack the ability to flourish as humans through their work. The second way private property can be understood for laborers such as these, who seem to have no need for private property, is to investigate how such a right affects them outside the working hours. The man who works in someone else's shop still needs a house to live in, a means for transportation, and the proper clothing to carry out the work well. If these necessary conditions are lacking, his ability to perform at work will be severely impeded, thereby preventing him from flourishing as a human through his work.

Furthermore, in emphasizing the subjective nature of work, John Paul II repeatedly points to the line in Genesis where God commands

man to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. This theme of subduing the earth has already been mentioned above, but man's dominion over the earth has special implications for the institution of private property. In giving man dominion over the earth, God did so that the former may subdue it and guide it to its final end. Also, dominion is not an abstract state but necessarily entails dominion over something, reaffirming the importance of private property. The act of dominion has two elements: one who dominates, and something which is dominated. If either is missing then there is no dominion. By taking away or forbidding private property, the state deprives man of the ability to "manifest himself and confirm himself as the one who 'dominates'."<sup>19</sup>

In seizing private property and abolishing private ownership, man's fundamental vocation as a worker who exercises dominion over things is denied, leading to a much greater evil than the physical discomforts and misery that accompany the abolition of private ownership. However, it is important to note that the Church has never held the right to private property as an absolute right, but has always "subordinated [it] to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone."<sup>20</sup> Besides showing continuity with Leo XIII's presentation of Aquinas, who asserted private property for common use, John Paul II reaffirms that the greatest good from private property comes from its use, and that it is "acquired first of all through work in order that it may serve work,"<sup>21</sup> and thereby serve the human person.

As has been shown, the institution of private property plays an important role in developing economic systems that work efficiently and make the most of resources at hand, but an even more important role in enabling man to flourish as a person. John Paul II was able to show this by first highlighting Leo XIII's clarification of the right to

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

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private property and then subsequently showing how important private property is for man to exercise his vocation as a worker with dominion over things. In expounding on human nature and drawing out the full ramifications of private ownership in *Laborem Exercens*, private property takes on new importance as it is connected in a very real way with man's growth as a person.



# Protecting the Vulnerable: Elder Care and Government

*Taylr Bahr\**

## *Introduction*

**T**HE CATHOLIC CHURCH CALLS PEOPLE TO CARE FOR the marginalized. This clear Christian call appears many times in Scripture. For instance, Proverbs 31:8-9 proclaims, “Open your mouth in behalf of the mute, and for the rights of the destitute; Open your mouth, judge justly, defend the needy and the poor!”<sup>1</sup> One of the most neglected populations in the United States remains the elderly. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that at least 10% of Americans ages 65 and older will experience some form of elder abuse in a given year.<sup>2</sup> Financially, the National Council on Aging found that over 15 million adults ages 65 and above are economically insecure, with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level.<sup>3</sup>

These problems will only grow as our nation continues graying. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that our country’s 65-and-older population will nearly double in size in the coming decades, from 49

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 31:8-9.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, “Elder Abuse Statistics” (2017), available at <https://www.justice.gov/file/1098056/download>.

<sup>3</sup> National Council on Aging, “Get the Facts on Economic Security for Seniors,” *Economic Security for Advocates* (March 01, 2021), available at <https://www.ncoa.org/advocates/public-policy/issues/economic-security>.

million in 2016 to 95 million people in 2060.<sup>4</sup> These realities naturally raise the question: What ought to be the public role in caring for the elderly? In this essay, I explore the role government should play in promoting—and upholding—the dignity of senior citizens in America. I will argue that, according to Catholic social teaching, government is oftentimes needed for *dignified* senior care, but it can frequently step out of bounds and even promote incentives contrary to the common good. Thus, I conclude some government involvement in particular senior care-related issues (such as euthanasia and senior social assistance programs) is necessary, while government intervention should be limited in other cases.

*Senior Care: What It Is and How It Has Evolved*

To explore how the government should care for America’s aging population, it is important to clarify what qualifies as senior care for the purposes of this essay. Senior care, also referred to as elder care, is a comprehensive term that encompasses a multitude of services that can be offered to seniors.<sup>5</sup> Senior care includes all services that can be provided to seniors in settings ranging from in-home to nursing care facilities. Services related to senior care differ greatly depending on a given senior’s stage in life. For instance, more independent seniors may only require help scheduling doctor’s appointments, while more reliant seniors may need help with particular medical conditions, e.g., dementia, kidney and bladder issues, etc. In the U.S., “intensive, round-the-clock care is...[relatively common]...where nursing staff may take

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<sup>4</sup>Jonathan Vespa, Lauren Medina, and David M. Armstrong, “Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections for 2020 to 2060,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, rev ed. (February 2020), available at <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p25-1144.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup>Life & Health Care, “What Is Senior Care?,” available at <https://lifeandhealthcare.com/glossary/what-is-senior-care/>.

vitals, provide activities, and offer emergency services.”<sup>6</sup> Though nursing homes are still a common form of elder care in the U.S., there is a greater variety of senior care services available to consumers today than ever before; such options include assisted living facilities, senior communities, and at-home care.

Institutionalized senior care is a relatively new phenomenon. In 1823, the Indigent Widows’ and Single Women’s Society opened in Philadelphia, making it one of the first senior living facilities to exist.<sup>7</sup> Senior homes were aggressively institutionalized during the Industrial Revolution in America, with factory principles oftentimes applied to care for the elderly.<sup>8</sup> The United States created an old age pension plan during the Great Depression, and by 1935, Social Security was passed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt; in 1965, Medicare and Medicaid were created to ensure that seniors would have accessible medical care regardless of their financial situation.<sup>9</sup> The development of the institutionalized senior home, along with the expansion of United States government programs surrounding elder care, have created the senior care system present in America today.

#### *The Catholic Understanding of Caring for the Elderly*

On November 22, 1981, Pope St. John Paul II recognized in *Familiaris Consortio* that senior treatment varies greatly across cultures. He writes that some cultures “manifest a unique veneration and great love for the elderly,” and do not see their seniors as outcasts or burdens on the family, but instead as active and responsible agents in family life.<sup>10</sup> John Paul II observed that elderly family members “carry out the important mission of being a witness to the past and a source of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., para 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., para 11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., para 12.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., para 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Familiaris consortio*, 27.

wisdom for the young and for the future.”<sup>11</sup> From his writing, it seems clear that a good senior care system should uplift family life by maintaining a senior’s critical role within the family, and it should not exclude seniors from the community nor see them as an inconvenience. However, John Paul II also acknowledged the sad reality of unacceptable treatment of seniors today in many cultures which have tossed the elderly aside as a result of “disordered industrial and urban development.”<sup>12</sup> These cultures which have tossed the elderly to the side have, according to John Paul II, caused “acute suffering” for neglected seniors and left many affected families spiritually impoverished.<sup>13</sup>

According to John Paul II, the Church has a special responsibility in guiding individuals to discover and properly maintain the role of the elderly in the civil, ecclesial, and familial spheres of society. He repeatedly turns to Scripture to bolster his case for both the indelible worth of older adults and also the recognition of the unique gifts seniors continue to offer at the end of their lives. In the “Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Elderly”, he writes that man remains forever made “in the image of God” (cf. Gen 1:26), and he points out that old age is so highly esteemed in the word of God that growing old is viewed as signaling a divine favor (cf. Gen 11:10-32).<sup>14</sup> With Abraham, in whom the honor of old age is emphasized, a holy promise was made: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great. I will bless those who bless you and him who curses you I will curse; in you all the families of the earth will be

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>John Paul II, “Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Elderly,” *The Vatican*, 1 October 1999, available at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_01101999\\_elderly.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_01101999_elderly.html).



blessed.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, at Abraham’s side is the older woman Sarah, yet through the power of God, she experiences, within the limitations of her aging flesh, the birth of Isaac. This biblical story affirms the reality that, though the elderly deserve loving care, our seniors are oftentimes capable of much more than imaginable and part of properly caring for them is recognizing the unique contributions they are still able to make in advancing the common good, even in their old age. John Paul II further affirmed this in his “Letter to the Elderly” when he referred to Saint Jerome’s observation that the quieting of the passions for seniors “increases wisdom, and brings more mature counsels.”<sup>16</sup>

Importantly, though John Paul II made clear the ideal is for the elderly to remain within the family, he recognized there are situations where admittance to a senior home is suggested—or even demanded—so a senior can enjoy the company of other older adults and receive specialized care. John Paul II recognized elderly care homes as praiseworthy when inspired not merely by administrative efficiency but also loving concern.<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, referring to the many elderly in nursing homes who died alone and without benefit of the sacraments during the Covid-19 pandemic, also wisely pointed out in *Fratelli Tutti*:

We have seen what happened with the elderly in certain places in our world as a result of the coronavirus. They did not have to die that way. Yet something similar had long been occurring during heat waves and in other situations: older people found themselves cruelly abandoned. We fail to realize that, by isolating the

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis 12:2-3.

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, “Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Elderly,” *The Vatican*, 1 October 1999, available at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_01101999\\_elderly.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_01101999_elderly.html).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

*Protecting the Vulnerable: Elder Care and Government*

elderly and leaving them in the care of others without the closeness and concern of family members, we disfigure and impoverish the family itself. We also end up depriving young people of a necessary connection to their roots and to a wisdom that the young cannot achieve on their own.”<sup>18</sup>

Francis is a personal witness to the wisdom of the elderly, having often referred to the influence of his maternal grandmother in teaching him the faith.<sup>19</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Francis, like John Paul II, affirms the critical role of seniors not only in society but also in family life. Thus, in situations where one’s home no longer meets the health care needs of an older adult, the Pontifical Academy for Life has reiterated Francis’ warning not be ensnared by the “throw-away culture” that can lead to laziness and lack of imagination in the search for effective solutions in compassionately caring for seniors.<sup>20</sup>

*The Role of Government in Dignified Senior Care*

Although the ideal for both seniors themselves and their families is for the elderly to be cared for in the warmth and security of the private family home, there are certain instances in which government is critically necessary to preserve the dignity of vulnerable elderly people, particularly going into the future. For instance, John Paul II

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<sup>18</sup> *Fratelli Tutti*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Elise Harris, “Pope Francis carries his late grandma’s words with him every day,” *Catholic News Agency*, 11 March 2015, available at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/31654/pope-francis-carries-his-late-grandmas-words-with-him-every-day>.

<sup>20</sup> Pontifical Academy for Life, “Old Age: Our Future,” *The elderly after the pandemic*, 2 February 2021, available at [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_academies/acdlife/documents/rc\\_pont\\_acd\\_life\\_doc\\_20210202\\_vecchiaia-nostrofuturo\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/acdlife/documents/rc_pont_acd_life_doc_20210202_vecchiaia-nostrofuturo_en.html).

recognizes that, though some people today still esteem and value old age, this wholesome attitude is much less prevalent for others as the result of a mentality which prioritizes immediate economic usefulness and productivity.<sup>21</sup> This dehumanizing attitude, by which the worth of an individual is judged by their productiveness in the market, often leads to disdain for later years of life and leaves many seniors—and even their children—wondering whether their lives are still valuable.<sup>22</sup> This mindset, John Paul II recognized, has come to a point where euthanasia is increasingly proposed as a solution to challenging life circumstances, which is deeply troubling because, as Catholic social teaching makes clear, “regardless of intentions and circumstances, euthanasia is always an intrinsically evil act, a violation of God’s law and an offence against the dignity of the human person.”<sup>23</sup> Government intervention banning euthanasia in all its forms, as well as statutory clarification that euthanasia is not “senior care,” but instead murder, is necessary to providing true, dignified senior care.

As we have seen, John Paul II emphasized that the most natural place for a person to spend their old age remains the environment in which an individual feels most “at home,” i.e., among family members, other loved ones, and where one can still make oneself useful.<sup>24</sup> This salutary form of usefulness is distinct from sinful forms of usefulness. Quite simply, it’s a human good to be allowed to make a contribution if one can: Gifts are meant to be used, as per the parable of the talents.<sup>25</sup> It is wrong, however, to dehumanize a person due to an incapacity. Further, John Paul affirms that while the ideal will continue to be for

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<sup>21</sup> John Paul II, “Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Elderly,” *The Vatican*, 1 October 1999, available at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_01101999\\_elderly.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_01101999_elderly.html).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 25:14-30.

the elderly to remain in the family, he notes that societies should work to guarantee “effective social assistance for the greater needs which age or illness entail.”<sup>26</sup> Government engagement in the form of social assistance, beyond the aforementioned statutory protections, I believe is particularly necessary to properly care for seniors who come from broken families, lack support systems, or have become completely isolated and neglected. In *The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and in the World*, published by The Pontifical Council for the Laity, there is a call for the Church’s pastoral ministry to those over the age of 65 to involve the implementation of a series of measures aimed at achieving a plethora of objectives, one of which was *a rightful place in the society and in the family*. This objective clearly calls for government engagement in elder care through limited social assistance, where necessary (e.g., social assistance for conditions requiring prohibitively high-cost professional care, such as with extreme cases of Alzheimer’s disease):

[O]lder people have a right to a place in society and even more so to *an honoured place within the family*. The family is called to be a communion of persons. It needs to be reminded of its special mission to foster, manifest and communicate love, and its duty to provide assistance to its weaker members, not least the elderly, and surround them with affection. The need for the family to be able to benefit from adequate means of material support should also be emphasized: economic assistance, welfare and health services, and appropriate housing, pension and social security policies should be available to the needs of the family.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>27</sup> Pontifical Council for the Laity, “The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and in the World,” 1 October 1998, available at

While some form of social assistance seems necessary, unbridled assistance from the government nonetheless does not seem to align with *dignified* elder care. Taking John Paul II's recognition that elderly people oftentimes still have great gifts to contribute to the common good in spite of the reality of diminishing physical and mental capacities for most seniors, I would argue that effective social assistance for America's elderly is assistance that ensures adequate means of material support but still empowers—or, at a minimum, incentivizes—the elderly to contribute the gifts they are able to the common good. John Paul II himself wrote that the most commendable social programs are those enabling seniors to continue attending to their physical health, their intellectual development, and their personal relationships, along with “those enabling them to make themselves useful and to put their time, talents and experience at the service of others.”<sup>28</sup>

Many of America's social assistance programs are presently failing at this because, though they may enable many seniors to stay physically healthy, mentally sound, and sociable from a material perspective (through the provision of material resources), America's current social programs for the elderly often fail to recognize the contributions those benefiting from such programs can still make, and may even discourage such contributions. For instance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI)<sup>29</sup> arguably disincentivizes tremendously talented seniors

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<http://www.laici.va/content/dam/laici/documenti/archivio/dignita-anziano-eng.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, “Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Elderly,” *The Vatican*, 1 October 1999, available at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_01101999\\_elderly.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_01101999_elderly.html).

<sup>29</sup> SSI is a United States federal government program that provides a monthly cash benefit for extremely low income and low resource seniors (age 65+), or blind and disabled persons of any age. “Federal Government

today from contributing their time, talents, and experience in service to others by mere virtue of them being older than a certain age. This is supported by a study conducted by David Neumark and Elizabeth T. Powers which found that “In states that generously supplement the benefits, labor supply among individuals relatively likely to participate in the SSI program falls off more than in less generous states, as workers approach the age of eligibility.”<sup>30</sup> I would therefore argue that a proper restructuring of senior-related social programs should help to provide health care or other forms of assistance where it is most needed, while also keeping programs local (and therefore more responsive) when possible, and encouraging seniors who are able to continue pouring their time and talent into lifegiving, productive activities.

*The Importance of Limited Government for Dignified Senior Care*

Having described the ideal role of government in ensuring dignified senior care (primarily through statutory protections and prudent incentives), let’s turn to the limits of that role. In *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II wrote that the “Welfare State” is often costly, bureaucratic, and counterproductive; moreover, he asserted that it often substitutes itself for private sector charity and businesses that work better.<sup>31</sup> I similarly believe that in most instances, to combat corruption and greed, we should diffuse power, not concentrate it. Competition and transparency can serve as very effective forms of

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Programs for Seniors,” *Eldercare Directory*, available at <https://www.eldercaredirectory.org/federal.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> David Neumark and Elizabeth T. Powers, “PERSPECTIVES: The Effect of the SSI Program on Labor Supply: Improved Evidence from Social Security Administrative Files,” *Social Security Administration: Social Security Bulletin* 65, no. 3, (2005), available at <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v65n3/v65n3p45.html>.

<sup>31</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 48.

regulation. This is because corrupt companies tend to be corrected effectively not by bigger and bigger governments, but by better businesses who take more market share by better delivering necessary goods and services to consumers. This reality is applicable to senior care, which is an industry in itself. Although recognizing that capitalism can be a mixed blessing, John Paul II was confident that “on the level of individual nations and of international relations, the free market is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs.”<sup>32</sup> He recognized that by definition, no bureaucracy (however well-structured or well-intentioned) far removed from those it intends to help can be as responsive or provide the kind of humane and individualized solutions that associations closer to the problem can devise.

John Paul II’s insight that markets are the most efficient means to effectively utilize resources and respond to needs was clearly demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic when elderly people were particularly at risk. While American government at all levels oftentimes hastily facilitated policies which directly resulted in the careless loss of human life,<sup>33</sup> countless entrepreneurs found safe, humane, and loving solutions for the elderly to live and flourish in the midst of a virus that was particularly threatening to their lives. For instance, one entrepreneur, Ellen Smithline, noticed a dire need for low-cost

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>33</sup> A notable example of rash government interventions in senior care were the policies and procedures implemented by Andrew Cuomo, New York’s governor, during the Covid-19 pandemic. First, Cuomo required nursing homes accept Covid-19-positive patients when New York’s hospitals were overflowing, and then, Cuomo intentionally hid data about deaths of nursing home residents. Bernard Condon and Jennifer Peltz, “AP: Over 9,000 virus patients sent into NY nursing homes,” *AP NEWS* (February 11, 2021), available at <https://apnews.com/article/new-york-andrew-cuomo-us-news-coronavirus-pandemic-nursing-homes-512cae0abb55a55f375b3192f2cdd6b5>.

protective face shields in her community, so in less than a couple weeks, she and her team developed exactly what was needed: low-cost, mass-produced face shields to provide protection to local, frontline health workers, many in elder care facilities.<sup>34</sup> The Society of Nurse Scientists, Innovators, Entrepreneurs & Leaders (SONSIEL) board members Rebecca, Julia, Marion, Ann, Faith and Hiyam also noticed the pressing need for personal protective equipment (PPE) inventory across America, so they united their communities and local businesses to move over 100,000 pieces of donated PPE to hard-hit facilities across the United States just 30 days after the launch of their entrepreneurial program in mid-March 2020.<sup>35</sup> The market presented a variety of urgent, unmet needs for seniors resulting from the pandemic, so entrepreneurs responded with rapid, quality innovations in at-home senior care and other realms of elder care that satisfied new, unmet demand.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, government involvement is oftentimes necessary for *dignified* senior care, but it is clear government can step out of bounds and even promote incentives contrary to what is good for elderly people. Some government involvement on particular senior care-related issues, such as euthanasia and senior social assistance programs, is thus ideal in elder care while government should be limited in other cases. It is important government's role does not expand beyond that because it can make elder care prohibitively costly, bureaucratic, and counterproductive. Further, in many instances, entrepreneurs working through the free market deliver more loving, humane care. Indeed,

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<sup>34</sup> "Meet 10 Nurses Pioneering Innovative COVID-19 Solutions," Johnson & Johnson Nursing News Highlights (May 5, 2020), available at <https://nursing.jnj.com/nursing-news-events/nurses-leading-innovation/meet-10-nurses-pioneering-innovative-covid-19-solutions>.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, para 13.



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there will likely be many future battles in the public square surrounding senior care, so it is critical the Church's clarifying voice of love and truth is heard in these debates.



# John Locke and John Paul: Allies in Defense of the Family

*Sean Piwovar\**

THE TYPICAL DEFENSE OF THE FAMILY in our time, even from Catholics, is primarily sociological. We are told that children raised in two-parent households have better socioeconomic outcomes than those raised in single-parent households.<sup>1</sup> We hear that men are better off being married than single.<sup>2</sup> However, these data-driven arguments are undermined constantly,<sup>3</sup> and the family remains in trouble.<sup>4</sup> It is becoming clear that political theorist Scott Yenor was correct in saying that champions of the family need to “move beyond biological or social defenses.”<sup>5</sup> A compelling and effective defense of what Pope St. John Paul II calls “the fundamental cell of society,”<sup>6</sup> and what Catholics recognize as an essential institution for the common good, needs something different.

For Yenor, it’s an articulation of the “human goods” promoted by the family.<sup>7</sup> That may sound intimidating, for it’s difficult to mount

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<sup>1</sup> Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 41, 47, 50.

<sup>2</sup> See Steven L. Nock, *Marriage in Men’s Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Fremstad et al., *The Case Against Marriage Fundamentalism* (Family Story, 2019), 27-29; Katie Roiphe, “In Defense of Single Motherhood,” *New York Times*, 12 Aug 2012.

<sup>4</sup> See Pew Research Center, “Parenting in America,” 2015; Philip Cohen, “How to Live in a World Where Marriage Is In Decline,” *The Atlantic*, 4 June 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Scott Yenor, *Family Politics* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Yenor, *Family Politics* 11.

such an argument in a pluralistic regime like America—our liberal tendencies make us uneasy to make arguments not driven by empirical reason. However, even John Locke, the father of liberalism himself, saw the family as an essential unit of society, and suggested a few ways in which the family promotes human goods. It is worthwhile, then, to consider how Locke, fully a liberal but of an age before the dominance of social science positivism, conceived of the family and defended it.

Locke's case regrettably falls a bit short, and is not sufficient on its own to fully convey the goodness of the family. It is important, then, that Catholics examine and communicate the totality of the goods of the family as taught by the Church, particularly from St. John Paul II. But while a proper family defense may require the holistic vision of the Church, Locke's case for the family is not without value—in fact, he should be considered an ally for Catholics as they defend the family because of the ways in which he articulates some of the very same goods as the Church, but for a pluralistic liberal society.

#### *The Lockean Family*

Locke's understanding of the family is rooted in his understanding of nature. Nature dictates that children require the care and attention of adults to prepare them for adulthood and the exercise of their own reason. Childhood is an "imperfect state" during which people are "ignorant and without the use of reason."<sup>8</sup> Parents, then, are granted power and authority over children while they are in this state, in order that they might develop reason. In fact, parents have a *duty* to exercise this power over their offspring, and their authority only exists insofar as they use it to fulfill this duty. Any shirking of responsibility renders a parent's authority nonexistent.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), II-VI §57.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, §58-65.

Since under this vision parental power arises out of a particular duty, it is not absolute, and certainly not permanent. To Locke, parental authority only lasts as long as the minority of the child, after which the child is presumably capable of reason and living in freedom. As the child ages, the authority is slackened, and eventually ends.<sup>10</sup> However, Locke does not think that the temporary status of parental authority leaves parents and their offspring devoid of any ties upon the adulthood of the children. Rather, children are bound to “a perpetual obligation of honouring their parents,” in which the people that raised them are due “respect, reverence, support and compliance” for the entire duration of their lives.<sup>11</sup> This duty is in part contingent on the quality of the parenting, but in all its forms is permanent: “from this obligation,” says Locke, “no state, no freedom, can absolve children.”<sup>12</sup>

For Locke, the family is primarily child-centric. It promotes the welfare of children, guides them through the development of reason, and prepares them to live in a free society. The family then binds children to an obligation to honor their parents. Fathers may bestow their estates upon children, continuing their legacy and providing their children with property. Thus, a good of the liberal family can be said to be *the development of mutual obligations between parents and offspring*, in which both are left better off.

Another good of the family can be said to be *the creation of intimate bonds of affection between kin*. Such bonds can be considered goods because, as Locke points out, the “suitable inclinations of tenderness and concern” that parents have for their children regulate how they wield their parental authority, preventing it from being too harsh.<sup>13</sup>

A final good of the liberal family is that *it prepares its members for life in political society*. A son is raised in such a way that he can have a “capacity of knowing the law” and “be fit to take the government of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., §55, 56, 58, 59.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., §67.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., §66.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., §63.

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his will.”<sup>14</sup> A critical component of a Lockean liberal regime is that people consent to being governed, and it is in fact the family that makes children capable of giving this consent.<sup>15</sup>

With a basic sketch of Locke’s understanding of the family and the goods it promotes, it is worthwhile now to turn to the Church, in order to understand its vision for the family. Locke, as we will see, provides helpful guidance for communicating some of the very same human goods articulated by the Church, but for a pluralistic society.

*The Catholic Family*

Pope St. John Paul II tells us that “the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being” is *love*,<sup>16</sup> that is, *to will the good of the other*.<sup>17</sup> In fact, he says, civilization itself should be built on this love. It is thus upon this vision that he and the Church defend the family. In fact, it must be the family, the first human society,<sup>18</sup> that is at the “centre and the heart” of a civilization of love.<sup>19</sup>

The Church teaches that the family begins with a marriage, where man and wife are joined together in a sacramental union. When they fall in love, men and women open themselves to one another, in a “recognition of dependency” and a “radical act of humility.”<sup>20</sup> They follow the mysterious pull of “an eros rooted in their nature” to make a complete and total gift of self to the other. Although marriage is on one level *natural*, being a consensual arrangement of exclusive sexual

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., §59.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., §54-61.

<sup>16</sup> *Familiaris consortio*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1766.

<sup>18</sup> *Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>20</sup> Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., “Fourth Lenten Homily 2016.”

partnership, it is on another level *sacramental*<sup>21</sup>—it is a communion of persons, a covenantal bond in which man and woman “give themselves to each other and accept each other.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, marriage must be indissoluble, because only in an unbreakable union can spouses truly give all of themselves and receive all of the other. In such a radical gift of self, man and wife love not just what they individually receive from the union, but they love the spouse for their own sake.<sup>23</sup> Marital love, in its immense beauty, imitates the love Christ has for the Church,<sup>24</sup> and reflects the Edenic relationship of Adam and Eve before the Fall.<sup>25</sup>

The marriage serves as the foundation for the family; thus, after the union of spouses comes the bearing of children. The love of man and wife is expressed in the joining of persons in the physical act of sexual intercourse. It is a cooperation in God’s creative capacities, for in this display of human love between two people, a third life is generated.<sup>26</sup> Thus, “the ‘communion’ of the spouses gives rise to the ‘community’ of the family.”<sup>27</sup>

Having children, continues St. John Paul II, should “consolidate” the covenant between husband and wife, “enriching and deepening” their conjugal communion and witness of self-sacrificing love.<sup>28</sup> The family thus serves as a locus for the exchange of love in a community, among all its members. Parents are responsible for guiding their children towards their fullest potential for Christian living, by educating them in the virtues, exemplifying holiness, and loving them

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<sup>21</sup> *The Catechism of the Council of Trent (or The Catechism for Parish Priests)*, Part 2 “The Sacrament of Matrimony – Twofold Consideration of Marriage.”

<sup>22</sup> *Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Humanae vitae*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Familiaris consortio*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants in the Meeting Promoted By the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family*.

<sup>26</sup> *Humanae vitae*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II*, 7.

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

as human persons.<sup>29</sup> “Tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service” should rule the home.<sup>30</sup>

*What Locke Gets Right*

The preceding understandings of the family seem vastly different from one another. Saying that families are formed out of the reasoned calculations of a Lockean state of nature is much drier than the grand romance of saying that they come out of the human vocation to love. As we will see, there is a basic, foundational idea that Locke misses, which results in this difference. However, before examining his shortcomings, it is worth recognizing what Locke gets right. There are a few important ways in which Locke properly and convincingly articulates the same goods of the family that the Church identifies, and family defenders of our day should take note.

Locke is on to something in describing how the family exacts obligations of its members. The Church is right with him on his claim that parents have the primary duty to care for their own children, and that education is a key responsibility.<sup>31</sup> This is an important point of contention in family discourse, as Marxists, for instance, see no reason why education and childcare should be particular to biological families.<sup>32</sup> In emphasizing that “nothing can absolve” parents from the duty to educate their children, Locke finds himself remarkably close to the Church, which calls the right and duty of education “primordial and inalienable.”<sup>33</sup> Even more specifically, Locke recognizes that the

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<sup>29</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2221-2228.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2223.

<sup>31</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), II-VI §56; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2221.

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), II-4.

<sup>33</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), II-VI §67; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2221; *Familiaris consortio*, 36.



family is a place for education in *virtue*,<sup>34</sup> echoing a key Catholic principle.<sup>35</sup>

Locke is also correct in showing how families draw children to obligations toward their parents, namely that of honor. The *Catechism* begins its section on the duties of children with the honor and respect they owe to their parents.<sup>36</sup> Both Church teaching and the Lockean argument are substantially influenced by the fourth commandment to “honor your father and your mother.”<sup>37</sup> The unique way in which families promote the reverence of young people for their elders, based on their biological and social bonds, is an important good that only the family can provide.

Finally, Locke is correct in articulating how the particular bonds of affection between family members are a good unique to that institution. He accurately identifies how the family is a place for the building of intimacy and tenderness between people, and how that plays a role in shaping the exercise of parental authority.<sup>38</sup>

What Locke gets right is that he understands the role of nature, specifically man’s natural inclinations, in illuminating the unique goods of the family. Notice that the goods he identifies aren’t *per se* exclusive to the family—no reasonable person would purport that the family is the only place where one can be educated in virtue or develop affectionate relationships with others. Locke is making an argument about human nature, and that to which we are naturally inclined and aspire. He cannot help but observe how the family unit, in its precise institutional structure, draws its members to form close bonds, and

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<sup>34</sup> Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Boston: Gray & Bowen, 1830), §64-65.

<sup>35</sup> *The Catechism of the Council of Trent (or The Catechism for Parish Priests)*, Part 2 “The Sacrament of Matrimony – Duties of a Wife.”

<sup>36</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2214.

<sup>37</sup> Ex 20:12; Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, I-I §61; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2214.

<sup>38</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), II-VI §59.

forms the best environment for learning virtue and sorting out mutual obligations. Locke's is a compelling case for pluralistic society because it doesn't rely on the legitimacy of the Church or even much of a Christian perspective—it makes observations about self-evident truths in nature that are accessible by anyone.

*What Locke Misses: Family as the School of Love*

Locke falls short of a vision like that of St. John Paul II because he fails to address one simple concept: that *the chief good of the family is love*. Families are not just about satisfying sexual desires and natural duties to children. They are about self-gift and self-sacrifice. With a view of the role of love in the family, the goods that Locke identifies have a more clear source, and can be more convincingly articulated.

Present in the family is the exchange of an authentic love, which involves *willing the good of one another*.<sup>39</sup> The unit of the family is a special place for this to be contained in the private relations between its members, for the communion of spouses in marriage forms a complete and total loving intimacy unlike any other social relation. Any pair of people, married or not, can work toward each other's good in friendship, but a married couple is capable of a deeper "betrothed love" formed by a complete and total gift of self.<sup>40</sup>

In the limited and private sphere of the household, the communion of husband and wife opens to community with children, and all members of the family in some sense reflect that witness of betrothed love. As St. John Paul II puts it:

The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be practiced in the relationships

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<sup>39</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1766.

<sup>40</sup> See Yenor, *Family Politics* 237, footnote 27 (referencing St. John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, 96, 87).

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between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family.<sup>41</sup>

However, the family is not completely private. It not only runs on love, but is in fact the *school of love*. Again, St. John Paul's description is illuminating:

The communion and sharing that are part of everyday life in the home at times of joy and at times of difficulty are the most concrete and effective pedagogy for the active, responsible and fruitful inclusion of the children in the wider horizon of society.<sup>42</sup>

As the first place in which children are educated in virtue, the family necessarily produces enormous goods for society. Children educated in love and virtue are citizens prepared to love and live virtuously. Locke, then, was halfway correct, for he understood how critical the family is for preparing children for lives of virtue in civil society.<sup>43</sup> The half he misses, however, is that children educated in self-gift are citizens who understand that social and political life is not simply about their own good, but also about the common good. Families do not better society because they achieve some bare minimum, making adults who pursue only narrow self-interest. Rather, families produce goods of self-sacrifice and commitment that stimulate relationships in the larger community based on the same foundation.

In avoiding the topic of love, Locke does not show much reason for the family to exist outside of preparing children for adult freedom. Why? Because he fails to develop any sort of suggestion that there are goods in the marital union *between husband and wife*. He does describe a "communion and right in one another's bodies" at the heart of a

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<sup>41</sup> *Familiaris consortio*, 37.

<sup>42</sup> *Familiaris consortio*, 37.

<sup>43</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), II-VI §61, 63.

marriage that brings with it “mutual support and assistance” and a “communion of interests.”<sup>44</sup> However, he seems to think that pregnancy arises out of not much more than a man and a woman’s satisfaction of their “strong desires of copulation.”<sup>45</sup> It is only once the child is begotten that parents develop “affection and tenderness” towards their offspring and exercise a restrained authority over them.<sup>46</sup> As a result, Locke feels marriage should only last “so long as is necessary to the nourishment and support of the young ones” and sees no issue with no-fault divorce.<sup>47</sup>

However, failing to explain the importance of love does not leave Locke’s case for the family invalid. In fact, it is simply the missing piece in an otherwise solid defense. St. John Paul II and the Church describe the love of the family as aspirational, as drawing family members in by their desires. What could this be but the very inclination that forms the institutional responsibilities that Locke sees as inherent in nature? It is the pull toward self-gift, the tendency towards authentic human love, that brings family members into an intimate familiarity with each other, and makes the family such a good place for education in virtue as children are prepared for civil society. The good of human love, the good of marital and familial self-gift, doesn’t invalidate Locke—it simply clarifies him.

### *Conclusion*

In heeding the advice of Scott Yenor, forming a defense of the family for our time requires going beyond biology or sociology to less tangible but no less important human goods. The most important of these are self-gift, sacrifice, and all that makes up authentic human love.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., §78.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., §54.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., §170.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., §79, 82.

While these goods are articulated best by the latter of this paper's two titular Johns, St. John Paul II, they are not the only goods of the family. The aspiration to a family life of love manifests more practically in the natural bonds of affection between kin that cultivate mutual obligations like education or care across the lifespan within the community of the household. The first of the titular Johns, John Locke, makes claims of value to contemporary family defenders because he identifies these goods of the family as critical truths for even a pluralistic regime.

An authentic family defense for our time should take into account the thought of both of these Johns. John Locke provides a roadmap for prudently navigating a pluralistic society, and John Paul II reminds us to never lose sight of love. A message like this—grounded in prudence but elevated by hope—is one that is wisely fit for the present age.



# Land Value Taxation: A Solution to the Universal Destination of Goods Problem?

*Harry Scherer\**

THE TERM “EQUALITY” CARRIES WITHIN IT a burdensome amount of baggage. If a foreigner were to ask fifty Americans the meaning of equality, he would likely receive fifty different answers. Depending on a given citizen’s political, economic, social, religious, and class position, the term might be received with enthusiastic admiration, careful skepticism, or reactionary derision. Because of the linguistic impediments to understanding this term, its common use might be worth reevaluating. A reality that we should not, and arguably cannot, escape is land, the literal ground on which we stand. When persons contact the land, a theoretical understanding of equality immediately comes to view. It’s no surprise that the nostalgic term “shoe-leather journalism” refers to traditional, “on-the-ground” conversations and reporting. When one seeks to understand better himself and relationships, he is urged to go “back to his roots.” An honest person is often described as “down to earth,” and even the word that refers to the virtue of humility finds its etymological foundation in the soil or ground.

Though this may be a grave sin for the faithful empiricist, we can, reliably (though not infallibly) look to our everyday language as evidence of reality. A casual look at this speech suggests that land equalizes more effectively than any abstract political theory; Rousseau is known by some, but the land is known by all. Today’s political operatives seem to intuitively understand this connection: the left

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through the environmentalist movement, and the right through the conservation movement. Our economists seem less interested in this observation; they seem to favor abstract concepts.

One exception exists to this general trend. Henry George was a 19<sup>th</sup> century American economist who was a pioneer—or, depending on whom you ask, a reformer—of the Progressive Era. George’s most popular work, *Progress and Poverty*, sold three million copies after its release in 1879.<sup>1</sup> This economist popularized the idea of land value taxation, also known as land value tax theory or single tax theory. George’s idea was that unimproved land value should be the primary, if not sole, category of taxable goods. In a Georgist paradigm, income, inheritance, sales, property, and all other categories of taxable goods would be excluded from any tax scheme. Instead, unimproved land, i.e., “all natural resources, materials, airwaves, air, soil, minerals, and water”<sup>2</sup> would be taxed at a rate as high as 95%. George was clear that nothing produced by the hands of men should be considered unimproved land; he thought of this taxable category as land *qua* land, as opposed to land *qua* property foundation.

The theoretical benefits of this program are said to be many:

The implementation of a single (land value) tax regime would arrest speculation in land (in the form of land banking) and consequently mitigate real estate boom-and-bust cycles; justly reward the work of both labor and capital; stabilize modern economies; result in more affordable and (in the long run) higher quality housing; remove major obstacles to the economic ascent of the poor (notably unaffordable housing and regressive

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Bess, “Henry George’s Land Value Tax: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?” *American Affairs*, Volume II, Number 1. Web, February 2018. <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2018/02/henry-georges-land-value-tax-idea-whose-time-come/#notes>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



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taxes on income and consumer purchases); help restore (and expand) the middle class; and usher in a broad and sustainable reign of economic prosperity.<sup>3</sup>

Some see precedent for this line of reasoning among those who would generally promote the merits of a market economy. Adam Smith, for example, claimed that, “Both ground-rents and the ordinary rent of land are a species of revenue which the owner, in many cases, enjoys without any care or attention of his own. Though a part of this revenue should be taken from him in order to defray the expenses of the state, no discouragement will thereby be given to any sort of industry.”<sup>4</sup> With this prescription, Smith suggests that taxation programs take into account the difference labor adds to what would otherwise be unimproved land. In other words, while Smith seems to acknowledge that owners have some title to the land that they have rightfully purchased, nonetheless, the labor they conduct on that land should not be “discourage[d].” Smith does not go so far as to claim that the state should formally invest in specific modes of labor through preferential taxation, but rather iterates that the distinction between the land and the work done on the land should bear on taxation.

John Stuart Mill, writing about seventy years after Smith wrote *Wealth of Nations*, claimed that:

All taxes must be condemned which throw obstacles in the way of the sale of land, or other instruments of production. Such sales tend naturally to render the property more productive. A seller, whether moved by necessity or choice, is probably someone who is either without the means, or without the capacity, to make the most advantageous use of the property for

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*. Book V, Chapter II. 1776.

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productive purposes; while the buyer, on the other hand, is at any rate not needy, and is frequently both inclined and able to improve the property, since, as it is worth more to such a person than to any other, he is likely to offer the highest price for it.<sup>5</sup>

Mill takes a more pragmatic approach to the relationship between taxation, labor, and use. His language is calculated and empirical, setting up a relationship of transaction and mutual benefit between buyer and seller.

The thought of both Smith and Mill, though, corroborates what George would go on to claim in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He says, for example, in *Progress and Poverty* that “the equal right of all men to the use of land is as clear as their equal right to breathe the air—it is a right proclaimed by the fact of their existence. For we cannot suppose that some men have a right to be in this world, and others no right.”<sup>6</sup> George asserts that land is wholly common to man, and that man has a right to use that land, at least to some extent, for his own. He does not go so far as to assert that man claims the land for his own, but instead confirms the notion that the land is common to all men. Man uses the land, in other words, but never is able to call it his own. For George, to do so would be to violate a sacred bond among men and their Creator.

George again nods to the importance of the local and proximity to the land in his 1883 work *Social Problems*: “To prevent government from becoming corrupt and tyrannous, its organization and methods should be as simple as possible, its functions be restricted to those necessary to the common welfare, and in all its parts it should be kept as close to the people and as directly within their control as may be.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with some of their Applications to Social Philosophy*, Book V, Chapter V. 1848.

<sup>6</sup> Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*. Book VII, Ch. 1. 1879.

<sup>7</sup> Henry George, *Social Problems*. Ch. 17. 1883.

In this reference, George makes a legitimate economic justification for subsidiarity and a respect for the proper dynamic relationship between and among different levels of social organization.

It seems that George, supported by Smith and Mill before him, recognizes that there is something different about land within the category of purchasable goods. The other goods in that category are not gratuitously given to man from the Creator: land is. This principle of the commonality of land could yield a robust discussion on the preferential option for the poor on economic grounds, solidarity on social grounds, or the common good itself. At the same time, George's analysis seems to directly address the Catholic social teaching principle of the universal destination of goods in ways that could be quite compelling.

In its exposition of this principle of the universal destination of goods, the Catechism makes clear that, "in the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race."<sup>8</sup> In a prelapsarian world, man would earnestly tend to the gifts of the land. This expectation does not disappear after the fall, but man is burdened in a way that he was not before the fall. The same article in the Catechism even seems to suggest that private property is instituted as a result of the break between God and man that took place at the fall. For example: "The right to private property, acquired by work or received from others by inheritance or gift, does not do away with the original gift of the earth to the whole of mankind. The universal destination of goods remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise."<sup>9</sup> Again, we are reminded that the original gift to humanity is "the earth and its resources," and that property acquired by "work" or

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<sup>8</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2402.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 2403.

“by inheritance or gift” does not fit within the category of this original gift.

The universal destination of the land is again defended by John Paul II in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*: “It is the task of the State to provide for the defense and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces.”<sup>10</sup> One of the more practical ways in which the State can satisfy this responsibility to safeguard common goods is through prudential and just taxation. Philip Bess argues that on economic, political, and anthropological grounds, taxation of the land could be a fitting use of taxation: “Human beings have rights of ownership to what we produce and improve and exchange (i.e., private property). But we do not have rights of ownership to natural resources that no human being produced, resources that come from nature and are, in fact, common goods (e.g., air, water, land, mineral resources—the resources on which all human life and society depend).”<sup>11</sup> Bess asserts that human persons are constrained by certain limits with regard to the realities over which they can claim ownership.

If we take both John Paul II and Bess at their word, then we can observe that it is at least the partial responsibility of the State to “provide for the defense and preservation of common goods, (e.g., air, water, land, mineral resources...).” The human person can produce some purchasable good (for example, a toy) on the land they have improved (say, by a factory) and can exchange that good (through retail or mass markets) for some other valuable good. Both George and *Gaudium et Spes* are consistent in their apparent prioritization of the common good over the value of private property for its own sake: “By its very nature private property has a social quality which is based on

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<sup>10</sup> *Centesimus Annus*, 40.

<sup>11</sup> Bess, “Henry George’s Land Value Tax: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?”

the law of the common destination of earthly goods.”<sup>12</sup> In the Catholic anthropological scheme, a notion of autonomous individuality does not exist; all personal acts are immediately embedded within a distinctly social character.

Aware of this social component, it is worth considering a taxation structure that would best account for both the common good of the land and the private property of improvements that are separate but from that same land. Bess says again: “land—all natural resources independent of human production, which belong to everyone—is the precondition of wealth and is to be taxed for human use; whereas wealth—the material and intellectual products of human labor, which by right belong to the laborer—is not to be taxed at all.”<sup>13</sup> Bess seemingly follows George’s binary approach with regard to taxation; any given category is to be either totally taxed or totally exempted. If it is the case that “God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone,”<sup>14</sup> then a reconsideration of the position of the land in our formal tax structure is in order. If the State is burdened with maintaining the common goods of the citizenry, then taxing the use of those goods would seem to be more appropriate than taxing the fruits of those goods’ uses that only came about by way of production, improvement, or exchange.

From the perspective of the Church’s social doctrine, analytical observers of George’s theory should not avoid criticism. For example, George clearly thought of himself as a materialist. According to some dated but insightful scholarship, “George’s distinction between subjective and objective desires is not, practically, a major one. He merely mentions it to show “...how nearly the field of material desires and satisfactions, within which the sphere of political economy lies,

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<sup>12</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 71.

<sup>13</sup> Bess, “Henry George’s Land Value Tax: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?”

<sup>14</sup> *Centesimus Annus*, 40.

comes to including all human desires and satisfaction.”<sup>15</sup> The author is quoting George’s *Science of Political Economy*, which was published in 1897, the year of his death. The scholar goes on to say that, in a Georgist framework, “in limiting economics to the objective acts of man in producing or altering material, the definition of the science must logically be a materialistic one.”<sup>16</sup> On these grounds, a Catholic would be hesitant to subscribe to a Georgist anthropological structure. At the same time, he would be correct to recognize common priorities between the Church’s social doctrine and George’s pragmatic concerns.

Bess’ argument that “neither Georgism nor good architecture and urbanism are salvific, nor do they warrant cultish devotion”<sup>17</sup> is a compelling one. At the same time, the land demands a recognition distinct from the sweat on the brow of its laborers. The former was created and is maintained by way of providential design, whereas the latter is a *response* to the responsibilities of that design. If the State is more concerned about the common than the limited, or the public over the private, or the social over the personal, then land might be the only legitimate source of governmental revenue. When the land is the only taxable category of goods, “one would seek title to land to use it, and only to use it: to live on it, farm it, sell things on it, manufacture things on it, mine things from it, and so forth.”<sup>18</sup> The State, instead of developing its budget through the production of its citizens, rewards the protection and maintenance of the land with a sizable tax on any claims to entitlement. By means of such a reimagined taxation structure, our politics would see a new perspective on the role of the

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<sup>15</sup> Forkosch, M. D. (1980). The Theoretical Background of Henry George’s Value Theory. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 39(1), 98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3486779>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>17</sup> Bess, “Henry George’s Land Value Tax: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?”; Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

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land in common life, the labor that contributes to its use, and the equality that we all enjoy because of these two realities. Through a recognition of the land's being and the worker's action, we are given the license to craft a political vision that embraces reality, both in theory and in practice.





# Carpenter and Co-Creator: A Metaphysical and Ontological Account of Human Action and Work

*Elizabeth Regnerus\**

**I**N THE FIRST CHAPTERS OF GENESIS, GOD “form[s] man of dust from the ground, and breath[es] into his nostrils the breath of life,”<sup>1</sup> as a being who is “in [His] image, after [His] likeness.”<sup>2</sup> This moment showcases the divine power of creation *ex nihilo*, and reveals that man, in a certain sense, and uniquely amongst other beings, also maintains creative power. The gift of creative ingenuity is accompanied by a responsibility to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue [the earth]”<sup>3</sup> and man himself. This striking prelapsarian moment is taken up in the philosophical work of Thomas Aquinas and Karol Wojtyła, who elucidate the extent to which man metaphysically and ontologically shapes himself and the world at large through his action and through his labor. In this way, man’s work and toil thus take on great significance in imitating and approximating his maker.

The first part of this essay will explore the Thomistic understanding of divine creation, to establish that although only God is capable of creation, and the analogy between creature and creator is an insufficient one, it is nonetheless clear human beings are existentially ordered toward propagating nature and co-creating with God. The second part will draw Thomistic metaphysics into Wojtyła’s “existential personalism”—the idea that man is a self-determining subject who plays a key role in his own ontological development, that is, becoming who he is as a human being. Only when man acts through

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:7, RSV.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:26.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:28.

the “intra-creative union of truth with freedom,”<sup>4</sup> a state of action which acknowledges universal truth about the human person and spontaneously applies this truth *through* human freedom does he successfully fulfill his existence. And particularly, as later made explicit by Wojtyła as Pope John Paul II in his encyclicals, man’s ontological development and participation in God’s divine ordering are the primary ends of man’s toil and work.

Creation, as Aquinas explains, begins in the universal cause of all being, of who “...brings all things into being from nothing.”<sup>5</sup> To begin to exist through divine creativity is understood as change, not according to accidental qualities such as quantity or place, but as an instantaneous shift from non-being to being.<sup>6</sup> The fact of being is the most universal effect, for everything that exists, is. Aquinas gathers that being “must be the proper effect of the first and most universal cause, and that is God.”<sup>7</sup> Thus creation in the proper sense is only possible through divine activity, for “to produce being absolutely, not as this or that being, belongs to creation...[which] is the proper act of God alone.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, because the Creator is the principle of the being of creatures, this shows a greater power in the Creator, an infinite one where creatures prove finite. The ability of creatures to produce a finite effect does not in any way render them strictly creative or prove that they “ha[ve] an infinite being...[therefore] it follows that no creature can create.”<sup>9</sup>

However, the created being bears “a certain relation to the Creator as to the principle of its being.”<sup>10</sup> All effects retain some vestige of their

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<sup>4</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Act*. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 277.

<sup>5</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. I.45.2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. I.45.5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. I.45.3.

cause. God is the cause of contingent beings. Thus, creatures reflect the persons of the Trinity “in [His] image, after [His] likeness.”<sup>11</sup> Aquinas is clear that there exists a vast divide between the way in which God is creative and that by which humans are understood to be creative or capable of making, but nonetheless there exists an inferior sense in which other creatures “create” or make. Forms cannot be created but by a subsisting being (of which God is the only one). But beings do admit of, in Aquinas’ terminology, “concreat[ion].”<sup>12</sup> In his intention toward creation, God ordains that man continue to propagate nature and collaborate in his providence, tasking Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”<sup>13</sup>

While God causes by breathing life over the world, He tasks man with cultivation, humanization, and population—gradual processes of becoming and attuning the world back in accord with God’s divine plan. Aquinas describes the phenomenon of air heating by the fire below it to posit the possibility of “something participat[ing in] the proper action of another, not by its own power, but instrumentally.”<sup>14</sup> In the same sense, though creatures lack the power of creation by means of the universal cause (for they are not such), created beings maintain the power to instrumentally create through divine power. Aquinas quotes Peter Lombard in arguing that through God’s creative power, He “can communicate to a creature the power of creating, so that the latter can create ministerially, not by its own power.”<sup>15</sup>

Examples of human imitation of divine creation exist in human labor and craftsmanship. When the craftsman creatively shapes his product, he holds the form of the object which he intends to make in

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<sup>11</sup> Genesis 1:26.

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. I.45.8.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>14</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. I.45.5.

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

his mind, devoid of matter. Through his ingenuity and expertise, the form of the object in potency becomes actual. The craftsman's creativity, as articulated by Jacques Maritain, "is an intellectual form, or a spiritual matrix, containing implicitly, in its complex unity, the thing which, perhaps for the first time, will be brought into actual existence."<sup>16</sup> In this way, the craftsman is able to create in a way that resembles divine creation. God similarly holds the form of a being in his mind before bringing it into actuality, put aptly in Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you."<sup>17</sup> This creative power brings souls, and everything that exists, into being from nothing. However, in the case of the craftsman, his object depends on his instrumental creative power acting upon pre-existing beings and materials. In building a table, for example, "this...thing from which he makes is presupposed to his action, and is not produced by his action."<sup>18</sup> The craftsman's wood and metal originate in the created world, regardless of the craftsman's existence or interaction, "caused not by the action of art, but by the action of nature."<sup>19</sup> Even deeper than the craftsman's dependence on nature, nature itself depends on matter, which depends on the universal cause, God himself. Thus, in no way does man replicate God's masterful *ex nihilo* action. But in His boundless generosity God allows man to share in His life through man's creative propagation of self and world.

Man's ability to apply creativity to his own action and work is key to his existential task. Karol Wojtyła presents an account of ontological development through human action which holds in tension man's created nature and simultaneous call to orchestrate his own path. For Wojtyła, action lies at the heart of what it means to be a moral human person. His anthropology begins with the idea that human action flows

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<sup>16</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. (New York City: World Publishing Company, 1953), 100.

<sup>17</sup> Jeremiah 1:5.

<sup>18</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. I.45.2.

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

from the existence which the human person receives from God. Man's action is self-determining and creative, but only results in fulfillment and rest when he acts in a way that befits his nature.

We abstract action, nature, and existence from the complex unity of the person, to explain the phenomenon of man. Wojtyła affirms the idea of human nature, which he defines as the subject's original condition at birth, "what is proper to man as man," thereby establishing what is "exclusively immanent in a subject of action."<sup>20</sup> Yet while "something happens in man" because of nature, described by Wojtyła as an "actuation," nature is not itself an effective force. Nature renders man ready and prepared for human action. Man's effectivity occurs when his acts "reveal [him] as a person...[and] manifest the concrete 'I' as the self-conscious cause of action."<sup>21</sup> Actuation (something happens in man) and action (man acts) represent different dynamisms in the person. Yet both dynamisms appear in the same "suppositum," Wojtyła's term that describes the person "as the subjective basis of existence and action,"<sup>22</sup> through which lived experience flows and defines an individual. The double dynamism in the subject can be summarized by the metaphysical assertion *operari sequitur esse* (action follows being) to demonstrate that man must first exist in order to act. Human action is accidentally subordinate to and is ordered toward existence.<sup>23</sup>

The subject is dynamized in both actuation and act.<sup>24</sup> Nature is dynamized by *esse*, by coming into existence. Yet in every act something new in man springs into being, spontaneously shaping him into the kind of person who does that sort of action. The result of this dynamism is moral character, "not as an abstraction, but as the strictest

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<sup>20</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 180.

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

<sup>22</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 143.

<sup>23</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 184.

<sup>24</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 199.

existential reality connected with the person as its proper subject.”<sup>25</sup> When consciously acting, man forms himself ontologically, for “the quality of acts...passes into man, the agent of acts.”<sup>26</sup> When the person performs courageous acts, the person becomes a courageous person. Person and action exist as one coherent reality. Thus, to say the person’s action fails to achieve a value implicates the person himself. Man is the subject and the object of his action,<sup>27</sup> so that self-determining acts “actualize the...ready-made objectivity of this ‘I’ contained in the intrapersonal relation of self-governance and self possession.”<sup>28</sup>

Wojtyła concludes that the will acts in response to and subsequently commits to values, for “to go out toward the good belongs to the essence of every ‘I will’”<sup>29</sup> Adherence to values requires deliberation and reliance on truth about what is good for the subject. Thus, the will is not only related to the objects of its volition but is dependent on the person and their judgment of the good.<sup>30</sup> The person does not always succeed in aiming toward the proper good, and often diverts his self-determining power toward false ends. Action that falls short “through moral evil...is, in a sense, non-fulfilment.”<sup>31</sup> Viewing moral evil as ontological non-fulfillment follows the Christian metaphysical tradition of understanding evil as a privation of the good, a deficiency. If the person is mistaken about the goodness of an action, they fail to bring the power of self-determination to the ontological fullness of ethical moral action and are therefore lacking in their very being. This emphasis on the formative reality of moral acts is not to diminish man’s need for grace, but perhaps even highlights the

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<sup>25</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 202.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 211.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 231.

<sup>30</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 241.

<sup>31</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 255.

necessity of man's salvation. For it is only because of the "Father's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of his Son" that we are not taken as "the sum of our weaknesses and failures."<sup>32</sup>

Personal fulfillment is tied up with an accurate account of the good. Self-determination, therefore, is not self-dependence, "for freedom is...realized through the subordination of oneself to truth."<sup>33</sup> The relationship between freedom and truth uncovers another dimension of the person's transcendence in the act—his spiritual dimension. Through moral action, man "contributes to the realization of truth, goodness, and beauty" and consequently his "spiritual life concentrates and pulsates" around these transcendentals.<sup>34</sup> Conscience is charged with guiding the will, through the mind's grasp of and search for truth, in selecting the good and establishing duty according to external values, "which conditions not only the person's performance of the act, but also his fulfillment of self."<sup>35</sup> Values ought to be obeyed to the extent to which they truthfully objectivize a good.

The reality of self-determination, that acts really inhere in the subject, is in a striking sense creative—the art of moral action. Man's potential to utilize his freedom through action relies on the person's individual development and character to achieve its actualization. However, the creativity of conscience is innovative only "within the truthfulness of the norm"<sup>36</sup> of what is genuinely valuable for man. Yet external norms or values do not denigrate the artistry of each human person in forming his interiority. The person's moral life exists in a "unique, unrepeatable form...in his lived-experience and

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<sup>32</sup> Wojtyła, "17th World Youth Day Solemn Mass, Homily of the Holy Father John Paul II," 2002. ([https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2002/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20020728\\_xvii-wyd.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20020728_xvii-wyd.html)).

<sup>33</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 257.

<sup>34</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 257-258.

<sup>35</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 263.

<sup>36</sup> Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 267.

fulfillment.”<sup>37</sup> Freedom is affirmed, not destroyed, within the schema of truth and norms. For fulfillment only follows freedom rooted in truth. Within this framework, a diverse array of human lives are available to the person. In this way, man shapes his life as an author and artist of his own story. Karol Wojtyła, after becoming Pope John Paul II, sums up this notion: “Not all are called to be artists in the specific sense of the term. Yet, as Genesis has it, all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.”<sup>38</sup>

Wojtyła further develops this understanding of human action and creativity when addressing the question of work in the encyclical *Laborem Exercens*. In this way, Wojtyła integrates the Thomistic metaphysics of creation while uncovering the lived dimension of labor and the fullness of the meaning of work in salvation history.

Man as image of God *images* Him “partly through the mandate received from his creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth.”<sup>39</sup> In his labor, man participates in a universal vocation to transform and humanize the earth. Precisely because he is a person, that is, “a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself and with a tendency to self-realization,” man is naturally ordered toward work.<sup>40</sup> In this way, like all human action, work becomes distinctly ethical and existential. The act of cultivation and propagation as part of man’s creative nature becomes an essential component of the development of moral character. The moral element of work does not make distinctions amongst lines of work, but conversely renders dignity to “whatever work it is that is done by man—even if the common scale of values

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, “Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists,” 1999. ([https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_23041999\\_artists.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html)).

<sup>39</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, 6.



rates it as the merest ‘service,’ as the most monotonous, even the most alienating work.”<sup>41</sup> This allows for a diversity of ennobling work, from changing diapers to computer programming, and establishes that in all sorts of work “the whole person, body and spirit, participates in it, whether it is manual or intellectual work.”<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, if work takes the good as its object and seeks the fullness of moral human action, it becomes perfective of man’s nature. Work, then, regardless of whether involving rote manual labor or complex analytical problems, is “a good thing for his humanity,” a process through which man becomes more fully himself.<sup>43</sup>

The prelapsarian command to fill and subdue the earth, however, is met with the brokenness of human action in the Fall. Wojtyła is adamant that this original intention was “not withdrawn or canceled out even when man, having broken the original covenant with God, heard the words: ‘In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.’”<sup>44</sup> The weight of human suffering extends particularly to the monotony and difficulty in work which men often undergo physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Precisely because man’s influence on self and creation tends toward entropy, answering the call to order his internal and external chaos becomes an essential part to man’s fulfillment as a person. In this way, man mirrors his Creator, who orders the primordial void of darkness into goodness and light. While at every moment, man “comes up against the leading role of the gift made by nature,”<sup>45</sup>—that is, he does nothing near as marvelous as the work of God—each individual sculpts his own life, with the hope that he makes of it something beautiful.

The model of Christ as carpenter in Nazareth for much of his life demonstrates what Wojtyła calls the “gospel of work,” showing that

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<sup>41</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, 24.

<sup>43</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, 12.

the basis for determining the value of work [is] the fact that the one who is doing it is a person who aims toward the good.<sup>46</sup> In imitation of Christ, we must take up our vocation and fill and subdue whatever corner of industry which we occupy. Even more deeply, in work man has the opportunity to take up the cross, the key moment of toil which our Savior undertook to reorder the chaos of human sin and frailty. While we live temporally, we are given the chance to “collaborate with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity...[and] carry the cross...in the activity [we have been] called upon to perform,” however glorious or pointless it may seem—for it points to a much deeper reality of metaphysical and ontological collaboration with the Creator.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, 27.

# The Political Theology of Nature and Grace

*Nick Schaffield\**

IN HIS CLASSIC WORK OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes encapsulates the fundamental problem of modern political philosophy as follows: “The most frequent prætext of Sedition, and Civill Warre, in Christian Common-wealths hath a long time proceeded from a difficulty, not yet sufficiently resolved, of obeying, at once, both God, and Man.”<sup>1</sup> So long as man is subject to two sovereigns, war necessarily ensues. Though his theories are in many respects more radical than those of subsequent thinkers, Hobbes’ thought is, at least on this point, representative of much of early modern political philosophy, which committed itself to overcoming the church-state struggles blamed for the violence of the preceding centuries. Such a “conflictual” account of church-state relations stands in stark opposition to traditional Catholic political theology, which leverages a distinction between nature and grace, and the attendant distinction between man’s natural and supernatural ends, to distinguish the civil authorities from the ecclesiastical authorities and

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (1968; repr. New York: Penguin, 1985), 609. To reinforce the prevalence of this opinion in modern political thought, consider the following quotation from Rousseau, a vastly different thinker: “[A]s a prince and civil laws existed, this dual power [of civil and ecclesiastical authorities] has resulted in a perpetual conflict over jurisdiction which has made any good polity impossible in Christian states, and no one has ever been able to figure out who—the master or the priest—he was obligated to obey.” See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “On the Social Contract,” in *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. and ed. by John T. Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 265.

to defend a harmonious subordination of the former to the latter.<sup>2</sup> This paper will argue that only by maintaining the traditional distinction between nature and supernature are Catholics able to articulate a political theology that simultaneously avoids collapsing the Church into the state (secular totalitarianism) or collapsing the state into the Church (theocracy). The paper will begin with an analysis of the nature of political communities as ordered toward a good before analyzing the concepts of nature and grace and arguing that maintaining a real distinction between the two is essential to upholding an orthodox political theology.

Aristotle commences the *Politics* by observing that “every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think good.”<sup>3</sup> Aristotle rightly observes that orientation towards a common end is not a merely contingent characteristic of some human societies, but is an indispensable condition for the possibility of *any* community—no matter the size. Without such an end, the individuals of which the community is comprised would lack any unifying feature, and would accordingly lack any characteristic capable of setting them apart from

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<sup>2</sup> For an account of the importance of avoiding such “conflictual” understandings of politics, see Andrew Willard Jones, Jacob Imam, and Marc Barnes, “Nationalism is Not Catholic.” *New Polity* podcast, July 2, 2020. <https://newpolity.com/podcasts-hub/qfryoehe5qqigzx2y86dqcy1x6sci> and Andrew Willard Jones, “The Priority of Peace and the Problem of Power,” originally published at *Communio* 48, no. 2 (Summer), *New Polity*, January 14, 2022. <https://newpolity.com/blog/the-priority-of-peace-and-the-problem-of-power>.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle. “Politics.” In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett and ed. by Richard McKeon (1941; repr. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001) 1252a1-5. For an excellent contemporary discussion of the common good, see Matthew Miner, “The Common Good and Political Philosophy.” Lecture delivered on June 6, 2022. *Reason and Theology*.

the rest of mankind. This is true of all communities, from voluntary associations like clubs, teams, and charitable groups no less than institutionalized associations like countries and states. Aristotle has little patience for those who deny the need for such a unifying end, writing that societies which confine themselves to “negative” duties like the protection from crime do not constitute true polities.<sup>4</sup> Later in the work, Aristotle observes that without the pursuit of virtue—the human good—the *polis* becomes a “mere alliance which differs only in place from alliances of which the members live apart.”<sup>5</sup> Spatial proximity is an insufficient condition for community, which demands a shared end.

Given that communities are individuated by the ends towards which they are ordered, and man has multiple ends (safety, food, education, justice, etc.), it follows that a single individual may claim *simultaneous* membership in multiple communities, with the communities ranked according to the goods towards which they are ordered.<sup>6</sup> One man may be a member of a family, a town, a church, a club, and a country. Properly understood, such communities are non-competitive. The good of “higher” communities like the country does not come at the expense of the good of “lower” communities like the town, nor does the good of the family come at the expense of the individual members. Such insights naturally raise the question as to

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1280b1-40.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1280b5-10.

<sup>6</sup> A clear (though controversial) application of this principle in nineteenth century Thomistic political philosophy can be seen in the *Summa Philosophica* of Tommaso Maria Cardinal Zigliara: “For the notion or nature of the subordination of societies ought to be taken absolutely from the end: for, seeing that the nature of the society arises from the end to which it is ordered, where the ends of two societies are subordinated, the societies equally ought to be subordinated.” “On the Subordination of the State to the Church,” in *Summa Philosophica*, trans. Timothy Wilson, *The Josias*, December, 2015, <https://thejosias.com/2015/12/01/on-the-subordination-of-the-state-to-the-church/>.

which community is ordered towards man's *perfect* or *complete* good, and is, by extension, the highest community in which he might claim membership.

For Aristotle, the answer is unambiguous: the *polis*. Though men are capable of living as isolated individuals or families, such a state of isolated self-sufficiency would permit little more than barren subsistence. Men's latent potencies for practicing the arts and sciences, erecting monuments, creating laws, and engaging in philosophical speculation would lie forever unactualized. Only "when several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing," and "the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life," is man able to flourish fully.<sup>7</sup> Such considerations lead Aristotle to conclude that "the state or political community, which is the highest [community] of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good."<sup>8</sup>

Aristotle's conclusion ought to be greatly troubling to Christians in general, and Catholics in particular. If one accepts that the Church is a community, then Aristotle's analysis implies either 1) that the Church is subordinate to the *polis*, whose good "embraces all the rest," or 2) that the Church *just is* the state, as is true in a pure theocracy. Both positions are not only unpalatable, but contrary to Church teaching, which holds that the civil authorities are not only distinct from the Church, but that they are subordinate to the latter.<sup>9</sup> Any political theory that purports to uphold orthodox teaching must offer an account of a) individuation (why the Church is a distinct community from civil society, even in cases where the membership of both communities is coextensive) and b) subordination (why civil society is

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 1252b 25-30.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1252a1-10.

<sup>9</sup> The precise nature of this subordination is notoriously controversial—Maritain, Bellarmine, and Murray are hardly in agreement on the matter—but the fact that one power is "lower" than the other is not in dispute.

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“lower” than the Church), and c) integrity (how “lower” communities are not absorbed by higher communities in the act of subordination).<sup>10</sup> This paper will argue that it is impossible to provide an account that meets these three criteria without positing a distinction between nature and grace.

Traditional Catholic theology draws a distinction between nature, which refers to the substances and causal powers of the created order, and supernature, which refers to the openness of all things to the divine decree.<sup>11</sup> Creatures are neither puppets of God nor extensions

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<sup>10</sup> All three points may be found in nascent form in Pope Gelasius I’s letter to Anastasius I: “There are two powers, august Emperor, by which this world is chiefly ruled; namely, the sacred authority of the priests and the royal power. Of these, that of the priests is the more weighty. . . . If the ministers of religion, recognizing the supremacy granted you from heaven in matters affecting the public order, obey your laws, lest otherwise they might obstruct the course of secular affairs. . . . with what readiness should you not yield them obedience to whom is assigned the dispensing of the sacred mysteries of religion.” Such statements are rendered unintelligible by the rejection of any of the three aforementioned points. See Gelasius I, “Letter to Anastasius I,” in *The Western Heritage: A Reader*, ed. Hillsdale College History Faculty (Hillsdale, MI: 2014), 371.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of nature and grace, see Matthew Miner, Gaven Kerr, Christopher Tomaszewski. “Classical Theism and God’s Love,” conversation on *Intellectual Conservatism*, January 6, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykJNglXBjKc>. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the distinction between nature and grace need not be construed as entailing a dualistic “layer-cake” system in which the operation of grace is a wholly extrinsic addition to an otherwise autonomous order of “pure nature.” As noted above, everything—natural or supernatural—is ultimately derived from God, the only question is whether the actuality is attained through God’s conservation, premotion, and concurrence acting through the powers of the created nature, or whether they are bestowed in a manner that goes beyond such potencies. Unless one wishes to argue to that the Beatific Vision can be attained independently of divine assistance, one cannot deny the need for grace;

of the divine (as advocated by various pantheists), but are created beings capable of exerting a causality proper to their respective natures. Every created being possesses a nature that “*is a source or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily*, in virtue of itself and not in virtue of a concomitant attribute.”<sup>12</sup> This is clearest in the case of *living* substances, which possess souls whose powers continually actualize the matter with which they are joined so as to bring the entity to maturity. A substance’s distinctive activity follows from its manner of being; its self-realization is a function of its nature more fully assimilating and more fully realizing itself in the matter with which it is combined. Trees grow leaves, absorb nutrients, and engage in photosynthesis as part of a developmental trajectory provided by their nature, or substantial form. At the height of its development, when the form is most fully actual, the tree is most fully exemplifying its “tree-ness.” This insight is encapsulated in the scholastic dictum, *agere sequitur esse*: action follows being.

Though each created being exerts real causal power in its motion towards self-actualization, none of these activities take place in an autonomous manner, in isolation from the causal activity of God. Because all being and actuality has its source in God, the unlimited act of existence, any creaturely activities—including natural ones—are ultimately dependent upon His premotion and conservation.<sup>13</sup> God’s

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unless one wishes to argue that all activity comes directly from God in a manner that leaves no room for creaturely participation, one cannot deny the existence of nature—both are explanatorily necessary.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, “Physics,” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, trans. Benjamin Jowett and ed. Richard McKeon (1941; repr. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001). 192b10-15; italics original.

<sup>13</sup> Domingo Báñez, the great Dominican commentator, develops the following example from St. Thomas: “Now, when a natural agent operating in sunlight that illumines the air, corrupts that air and from it generates water, which at the very same instant of its generation is illumined by the same sun which illumined the air, no one will say that the natural agent by its own action produced the light, nor that by itself it existed as the cause of



utter transcendence, by which He is more intimately present to all creatures than the creatures are to themselves, ensures that His action does not destroy the activity of the creatures, but acts as a condition for the latter's possibility. Thus, traditional Catholic theology is able to avoid the extremes of pantheism, which collapses all creatures *into* God, such that God and the world are one, occasionalism, which denies creatures' causal efficacy, and deistic dualisms in which nature exists and acts in a manner wholly autonomous from God: though *distinct* from God, creatures and their respective activities are never *independent* from the God in whom they “live and move and have [their] being.”<sup>14</sup>

The supernatural realm, by contrast, is *open* to creatures, but exceeds the capacity of their powers to reach independently of divine assistance.<sup>15</sup> In the first article of the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas writes that “man is directed towards God as to an end that surpasses his reason”—man can attain a natural knowledge of the fact *that* God exists, but cannot, independently of divine assistance, attain the kind of knowledge of God apprehended at the Beatific Vision.<sup>16</sup> Precisely

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the lighting.” All activity, including activity proper to substances' natures, presupposes not only the actuality of existence (first act) but the actuality of their causal powers (second act), both of which have their ultimate source in God. See Domingo Báñez, *The Primacy of Existence in Thomas Aquinas: A Commentary on Thomistic Metaphysics*, trans. Benjamin Llamzon (Proctorville, OH: Wythe-North Publishing, 2021), 83.

<sup>14</sup> Acts 18:28 NAB.

<sup>15</sup> The proper interpretation of Aquinas on the issue of nature and grace is notoriously controversial. Here, I am offering a fairly general account that most Thomists would find agreeable. Regardless of the precise account one favors, it should be clear that 1) through grace, man possesses the capacity to receive Beatitude, which is beyond his natural powers, and 2) this possibility does not destroy the legitimacy of his natural perfection, which is never hostile to the supernatural.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. English Dominicans (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), I.I.1 *corp.* Garrigou-Lagrange, a writer in the commentatorial tradition, goes so far as to argue that “to say that created

because the Beatific Vision lies beyond the scope of man's natural powers, he cannot attain such a vision without the activity of grace. This grace is not *against* nature, but above it; it is not and cannot be in *conflict* with nature, which is wholly subordinate to it.

With a firm grasp of the distinction between nature and grace (and the attendant distinction between man's natural and supernatural ends), one is equipped to resolve the problem of how two separate communities can govern a (potentially) coextensive set of persons without one power dissolving into the other. The state is ordered towards the attainment of man's natural end, the kind of flourishing described by Aristotle in the *Politics*, whereas the Church is ordered towards the attainment of man's supernatural end, the Beatific Vision.<sup>17</sup> Because communities are distinguished by the goods towards which they are ordered, rather than the persons of which they are constituted, a state of affairs in which the Church and state existing in a non-competitive manner is once again rendered a live option: one community can be ordered towards the natural good, and one can be ordered towards the supernatural good. When properly functioning, neither conflicts with the other; nor does the subordination of the state to the Church destroy the former's legitimate autonomy, any more

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intelligence can, solely by its natural powers, positively and properly know the divine essence, Deity in itself, can even see that essence without medium, is equivalent to saying that the created intellect has the same formal object as has the uncreated intellect. And that is the same thing as to say that the intellectual creature has the same nature as uncreated intelligence, that is, is God Himself. But a created and finite God is an absurdity, found in pantheism, which cannot distinguish uncreated nature from created nature." See Garrigou-Lagrange, *Reality* (Veritatis Splendor, 2012), 104-105.

<sup>17</sup> Once again, it should be noted that the precise relationship between these "ends" is very complicated and deserves much explication. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the possibility of attaining the Beatific Vision in no way undermines the legitimacy of natural goods, the securing of which is the end of the state.

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than creatures' dependence upon the conservation and promotion of their Creator destroys their causal integrity.

Classical Catholic political philosophy recognized this distinction and relied upon it heavily in delineating the proper relationship between civil and ecclesiastical authorities. While investigating the nature of the subordination of the state to the Church, Robert Bellarmine makes the following argument:

Such subordination [of the civil authorities to the ecclesiastical authorities] can be understood in two manners. First, that the authority which is in the subordinate derives from the subordinating, such as the authority of the vicar which derives from the person whose vicar this is, and the authority of the ambassador, which derives from the prince who sent him, and the authority of the judge or the governor, which derives from the king. In this case, without a doubt, the authority of the subordinating includes that of the subordinate. The other way is not that one derives from the other, but that it is subject and subordinate only because *the end of the first is subject and subordinate to the end of the second*, as are the subordination and subjections of the different arts with respect to the art of governing peoples, which can be called regal.<sup>18</sup>

Bellarmino uses the distinction of man's two (non-competitive) ends to reject the former account of political authority, in which civil authorities directly derive all power from the Church in a manner

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<sup>18</sup> Bellarmine, Robert. "On the Temporal Power of the Pope. Against William Barclay." *On Temporal and Spiritual Authority*. Edited and translated by Stefania Tutino. (Liberty Fund, 2012), 157. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/on-temporal-and-spiritual-authority>; italics mine.

analogous to that by which magistrates and ambassadors derive their authority from the monarch, because from such a model it “follows that the political authority is conjoined with the ecclesiastical” in a manner that would not accord with Catholic tradition and fails to grant the political authority due integrity as a natural institution.<sup>19</sup> Bellarmine argues that the second model of subordination, which ranks authorities according to the nature of the ends to which they are ordered, provides a truer account of the nature of the relationship between Church and state by maintaining the supremacy of the former over the latter without destroying the state’s legitimate integrity.<sup>20</sup>

Recognition of the distinct ends of the Church and state led Francisco Suárez, a later Jesuit, to defend the state’s integrity as a natural institution that is subordinate to (but irreducibly distinct from) the Church. Suárez insists that “Christian kings do possess supreme civil power within their own order and...recognize no other person, within that same temporal or civil order, as a direct superior upon whom they essentially depend in the exercise of their own proper power.”<sup>21</sup> Though the state possesses legitimate independence from

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>20</sup> One need not accept Bellarmine and Suárez’s conclusion that the Church possesses indirect power over the state, such that the latter may be instrumentalized to accomplish the higher ends of the former, to accept that the Church possesses a higher end than the state. Maritain, who rejects such instrumentalization, writes that “The direct ordination of the human person to God transcends every created common good—both the common good of the political society and the intrinsic common good of the universe.... Thus the indirect subordination of the body politic—not as a mere means, but as an end worthy in itself yet of lesser dignity—to the supratemporal values to which human life is appendant, refers first and foremost, as matter of fact, to the supernatural end to which the human person is directly ordained.” See Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1951), 149-150.

<sup>21</sup> Francisco Suárez, “A Defense of the Catholic and Apostolic Faith,” in *Selections from Three Works*, ed. Thomas Pink, trans. Gwladys L. Williams, Ammi Brown, and John Waldron, and rev. by Henry Davis, S.J. Reprinted

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the Church (the state's power is not, as Bellarmine noted, directly *derivative* from the Church), it is no more opposed or alien to the Church than nature is opposed or alien to the perfection of grace. When acting properly, the ends of the state, a natural institution, can in no way conflict with the end of the Church, a supernatural institution. In much the way that the family's superiority to the individual in no way erases the distinction between the two or renders the latter a mere extension of the former, the Church possesses superiority over the state insofar as it is ordered towards a higher end, but this in no way entails the collapse of the state into the Church: the latter elevates the former.

The radical political implications of *denying* the distinction between nature and grace are clearly seen in the political theories of early modern political theorists like Thomas Hobbes and Benedict Spinoza, whose works can be largely understood as a reaction to the kind of theories advocated by Suárez and Bellarmine. In place of the traditional doctrine of the “two powers,” which Spinoza considers “too frivolous to merit refutation,” Spinoza advocates a monistic absolutism in which all authority—spiritual and otherwise—resides in the head of state.<sup>22</sup> Spinoza regards such unity as the only alternative to internecine struggle and civil war: “Whosoever, therefore, wishes to take this right [of supremacy in religious matters] away from the sovereign power is desirous of dividing the dominion; from such division, contentions, and strife will necessarily spring up...and defy all attempts to allay them.”<sup>23</sup> Precisely because Spinoza collapses the distinction between God and the world (“For the eternal and infinite Being, which we call

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from 1944 edition (Liberty Fund, 2015), 766-767.

<https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/selections-from-three-works>.

<sup>22</sup> Spinoza, Benedict. “Theologico-Political Treatise,” in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, vol. 1 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1670), 251-252.

<https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/elwes-the-chief-works-of-benedict-de-spinoza-vol-1>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

*God or Nature*<sup>24</sup>) and the attendant distinction between nature and grace, his ontology simply *lacks room* for complementary societies that are perfect with their respective domains.<sup>25</sup> Spinoza's fear that civil conflict follows inevitably upon a recognition of the Church's autonomy from the sovereign presupposes a false *parity* between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Bellarmine and Suárez do not believe the theory of the two powers to invite conflict because they recognize that both are ordered towards distinct and non-competitive ends. Without distinction and subordination, both powers are placed on a univocal plane upon which one must cannibalize the other on pain of extermination.

Though this paper has been primarily devoted to articulating the theological conditions for the possibility of affirming three points essential to orthodox Catholic political philosophy, rather than detailing the manner in which such points should be instantiated, it is clear that the acceptance of such principles reveals some political

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<sup>24</sup> Benedict Spinoza, "Ethics," in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, vol. 2, trans. R.H. M. Elwes (London: George Bell and Sons, 1662), 189; italics mine. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/elwes-the-chief-works-of-benedict-de-spinoza-vol-2>.

<sup>25</sup> It is no accident that Hobbes, another monist, draws similar conclusions about the Leviathan, in whom civil and ecclesiastical power are wholly unified: "[T]he Examination of Doctrines belongeth to the Supreme Pastor, the Person which all they that have no special revelation are to believe, is (in every Common-wealth) the Supreme Pastor, that is to say, the Civill Sovereigne." Though he disagrees with Hobbes' proposed solution, Rousseau praises Hobbes' perspicuity in diagnosing the depth of the problem of church-state relations: "Of all Christian authors, the philosopher Hobbes is the only who clearly saw the disease and the remedy, who dared to propose reuniting the two heads of the eagle and the complete return to political unity, without which neither state nor government will ever be well constituted." See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (1651, repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 323-460. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/smith-leviathan-1909-ed>. See also Rousseau, "The Social Contract," 266.

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arrangements to be inherently disordered, and, by extension, impracticable. First, any political arrangement in which political authorities actively oppose the ecclesiastical authorities or hinder them from their pastoral duties ought to be rejected insofar as it forecloses nature to elevation by the supernatural, weakens the Church's ability fulfill its mission, and infringes upon matters over which the Church possesses supreme authority.<sup>26</sup> Second, any political arrangement in which the Church is instrumentalized by government authorities for purposes of national unity, identity, etc. ought to be likewise rejected for its willingness to subordinate a power of a higher order to that of a lower.<sup>27</sup> Third, any positivistic political arrangement that renders the state the ultimate arbiter in matters of faith and morals is likewise impermissible insofar as such regimes deny the existence of any authority prior to that of the civil laws of the polity. Lastly, and perhaps most relevantly to contemporary Western states, any political arrangement in which civil authorities strive for indifference in religious matters (assuming, for the sake of argument, that such a state were a genuine possibility) is equally disordered. Such arrangements

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<sup>26</sup> "Religious communities also have the right not to be hindered in their public teaching and witness to their faith, whether by the spoken or by the written word." See Vatican Council II, "Dignitatis Humanae," (Rome: December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1965), 4, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html).

<sup>27</sup> The twentieth century Italian fascist party provides a clear example of such inversion. Catholicism is upheld, not because it is true, but because it is the historic religion of the Italian people. Mussolini notes that "The Fascist state is not indifferent to religious phenomena in general, nor does it maintain an attitude of indifference to Roman Catholicism, *the special, positive religion of the Italians*." See Benito Mussolini, "The Doctrine of Fascism," in *Nationalism & Populism (320 BCE-2017 CE). Defining Documents in World History*, ed. David Simonelli (Ipswich, Massachusetts: Salem Press, 2017), 318; italics added. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=e000xna&AN=1513424&site=ehost-live>.

presuppose that nature is indifferent to the perfection of grace and that the intellect is indifferent to the possession of truth.<sup>28</sup> Civil authorities, insofar as they are natural entities, must remain *open* to the operation of grace and supernature.<sup>29</sup> Though such points provide boundaries that political authorities cannot transgress, they leave wide latitude for variation amongst peoples and cultures, as well as for prudential judgment.

By distinguishing between nature and supernature, Catholic theologians and political theorists are able to present a political theology that 1) successfully distinguishes between the Church and the state and 2) subordinates the state to the Church without 3) eradicating the legitimate independence of the civil authorities. Denial of the distinction between nature and grace, and, by extension, man's natural

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<sup>28</sup> Against the idea that the state ought to be indifferent to the religious practice of its members, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "The right to religious liberty is neither a moral license to adhere to error, nor a supposed right to error, but rather a natural right of the human person to civil liberty, i.e., immunity, within just limits, from external constraint in religious matters by political authorities" (CCC 2108). *Dignitatis Humanae* likewise states that the "one true religion subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus committed the duty of spreading it abroad among all men," and that thus "Religious freedom...has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society. Therefore it leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ." "Dignitatis Humanae," 1.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the problem of theories of neutrality based on state incompetence in religious matters, see Michael Dunnigan, "Dignitatis Humanae: Reversal, Rupture, or What?" interview with John DeRosa, June 14, 2022, <http://www.classicaltheism.com/dunnigan/> and David C. Schindler, "The Politics of the Real," interview with Larry Chapp and Rodney Howsare, January 21, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FBnD5En9EY>.



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and supernatural ends, can only terminate in the collapse of the civil authorities into the Church (theocracy) or the collapse of the Church into civil society (secular totalitarianism). Upholding some form of the distinction between nature and grace is not only necessary for maintaining an orthodox theology, but mainstream Catholic political theory.



# The Religious Spirit of the United States

*Lizzie Self\**

THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE IS FOUNDATIONAL for American life, but religion's impact has not been insignificant. Alexis de Tocqueville highlights the unique relationship between the Catholic Church and society in the States in *Democracy of America*. He says Catholics are especially democratic,<sup>1</sup> and this might mean that although Catholics are a minority in the United States, even among Christians, they might in some sense resemble most truly the American spirit. Though the tide of current discourse might dissuade us from believing that the United States is a religiously grounded country, thinkers such as Max Weber<sup>2</sup> and Wilhelm Röpke, by their studies of religious currents in civil life, reveal inadvertently that this is not an honest conclusion. Tocqueville shows us that the Catholic Church might define the American religious spirit, and the national characteristics that ground this judgment have not faded. If this is so, then religion may have more enduring power than is often believed; a “pre-Reformation, undivided Christianity”<sup>3</sup> that is a source of unity for all nations might be proven in the Catholic Church. This paper analyzes the United States' religious traits so that we might know if she as a nation serves the Church or any church. It also considers

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville. “Of the Principal Causes,” in *Democracy in America*, ed. Eduardo Nolla (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 2010), 468. Hereafter cited *PC*.

<sup>2</sup> Weber suggests in the *General Economic History* that Christianity and Judaism have always been “plebeian religions,” and even the ancient Church's struggle with Gnosticism was a democratic struggle with aristocrats (363).

<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Röpke, “The Economic Necessity of Freedom,” *Modern Age*, Summer 1959: 236. Hereafter cited *EN*.

traits shared by the United States and the Catholic Church; what bodies promise true liberty and belonging quite like these two? American Catholics have a unique opportunity to reflect on what unity in diversity means, both nationally and within the Church.

While the United States was founded primarily by Protestants, today more than ever it is unclear what it means for her to possess a Protestant character. Weber writes early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century about the effects of Protestant spirituality on earlier Northern European economics, and his observations might easily be transferred onto American economics and behavior. We must note that Weber does not concern himself primarily with theology, but with moral practice and the social consequences of these practices and tendencies. To determine whether the United States possesses the Protestant spirit of capitalism that Weber describes, I will compare his study to Tocqueville's reflections on the early United States' associations and religious institutions. Tocqueville is of course, not a theologian either, but these thinkers' attention to different theological doctrines as they affect human behavior will reveal the fact that the United States does indeed possess a Christian spirit.

One of the essential questions American readers bring to Weber's work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is whether the religious spirit underlying the American Founders' ethic was already dead as they wrote, and, if not, whether it is alive today. The most important proof of Protestant religion in American society that we can borrow from Weber's analysis is its reliance on doctrine and sacraments, especially confession. If Weber manages to prove through the presence of these elements that Protestantism did shape the spirit of capitalism, then by the same token, not only is the American spirit (which, perhaps wrongly, is nearly synonymous with the spirit of capitalism today) somewhat religious today, but so it was also at the time of the Founding. Weber contends that the Founders' religious ideas are completely secularized. But in reviewing the process of

secularization—the destruction of magic<sup>4</sup> and sacrament across the Christian denominations, as Weber describes it—the process does not yet appear finished.

Weber observes a coherence among different Protestant denominations that depends on the survival of sacraments and dogma despite the Reformation. He notes that the early iterations of these denominations, which transitioned and splintered from each other “only gradually,” nevertheless yielded practically identical moral conduct.<sup>5</sup> This does not imply that the dogmas of the different denominations proved inconsequential, only that they yielded the same fruit: what he describes as an ascetic morality. This ascetic morality amounts to good economics and falls short of an orthodox understanding of asceticism. Asceticism, Weber claims, is the moral code of the “virtuosi” of the Catholic faith. The Church does ill, he contends, when she does not recognize that “the individual is a closed unitary ethical personality,” but allows this highest class to determine the morality of the masses.<sup>6</sup> In this way, religious ethics generate social and even economic classes. He further explains that this morality is not properly dogmatic: “The various different dogmatic roots of ascetic morality did no doubt die out after terrible struggles,” he writes, “but the original connection with those dogmas has left behind important traces in the later undogmatic ethics.”<sup>7</sup> Finally, Weber gives us an illustration of this connection between economic and moral well-being: the ascetic living in the desert lives most economically, and

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<sup>4</sup> The “magic” with which Weber is most concerned, and to which he says the old religions aspired, is the evasion of final judgment. Whether or not this is how he always means “magic” is unclear.

*General Economic History*, trans. Frank H. Knight (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950), 364. Cited hereafter *GEH*.

<sup>5</sup> Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Parsons (Routledge, 2001) 54-55. Cited hereafter *PE*.

<sup>6</sup> Weber, *GEH*, 365.

<sup>7</sup> Weber, *PE*, 55.

therefore morally.<sup>8</sup> I will consider later whether or not ethics can survive without dogma.

Weber finds great cultural significance in the development of the concept of predestination in the thought Luther and Calvin. Weber argues that while Luther de-emphasized the doctrine of predestination, especially as he became a more political figurehead of the Reformation, Calvin increased its significance.<sup>9</sup> Calvin's "magnificent consistency" in adherence to this doctrine would come to dominate culture through extreme isolation of the individual. "No one could help him... No priest... No sacraments... No Church."<sup>10</sup> Weber understands Calvin's moment in the history of the doctrine of predestination as the culmination of a great historical process: "the elimination of magic from the world which had begun with the old Hebrew prophets and, in conjunction with Hellenistic scientific thought, had repudiated all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin."<sup>11</sup> In this way Weber ties together both Protestantism and rationalism. In the minds of some, the United States seems steeped in the residue of this religious event as an intellectual inheritance. The individualism that Tocqueville observes in the nation's nascent stage seems to the American a given of our human nature.

But another manifestation of religious spirit in the United States—one which Weber does not consider, and which would refute his claim that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination has destroyed the priority of sacraments—is public confession. Unifying sacraments are quite visible in early American political life. The Declaration of Independence depends not only on a covenant with God, but also one among men. When the Founders "mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor," one might recall the

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<sup>8</sup> Weber, *GEH*, 364.

<sup>9</sup> Weber, *PE*, 59.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

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

public confessional of the early Church: the accountability of the community, the shared penances. How much does this resemble English Puritan literature, warning men against trusting dearest friends, as “Only God should be your confidant?”<sup>12</sup> Weber admits that in regards to private confession, “Calvin was suspicious only on account of its possible sacramental misinterpretation.”<sup>13</sup> No one can refute that Calvin held the sacrament of confession in disdain. But his main complaint against confession was the sacrament’s privacy, which elevates the priest and seems to discard the presence of the Body. The public confession of the American covenant is, then, not only proof that Calvinism has not killed the sacramental spirit, but also that the United States retains an ancient facet of the Christian faith.

The main reason that many observers have applied Weber’s study of the Protestant spirit to the United States is her industry and “busyness.” The average American would affirm, as Weber summarizes Calvinism, that “brotherly love...is expressed in the first place in the fulfillment of the daily tasks given by the *lex naturae*.”<sup>14</sup> Everyone in a nation dominated by the Protestant ethic works hard to prove that he numbers among the saved; he strives to fill an impossible, undefined duty. Weber continues, “The process of this fulfillment assumes a peculiarly objective and impersonal character, that of service in the interest of the rational organization of our social environment.”<sup>15</sup> If we accept Weber’s characterization of the work effort as Protestant, then this does seem to be evidence of Reformation influence on the American character. However, as we will see in a reflection from Tocqueville, duty and work hold a significant station in Catholicism as well.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid, 62.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Weber, *PE*, 64.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

Ultimately, Weber does not dare hope for recovery of the relationship between reason and faith, between personal matters and duty. He writes that compared to the pagan world surrounding Judaism, Christianity is magicless, and that has made the Western, Christian world much more amenable to rational economics than the spiritual East.<sup>16</sup> Tocqueville, the fallen-away Catholic, writes that Catholicism has political and economic import, but to a very different effect. Christian duty, as he more adequately describes it, prioritizes service and the defense of equality. Catholicism subjects the high and low of society to the same dogmatic rule; “it compromises with no mortal, and by applying the same measure to each human being, it loves to mix all classes of society together at the foot of the same altar, as they are mixed together in the eyes of God.”<sup>17</sup> This mixing and gravitation toward unity transcends national borders. Tocqueville describes an American Catholic congregation’s sense of duty toward their fellow faithful in Poland.<sup>18</sup> With language befitting ancient Israel, the preacher highlights the Polish as part of God’s chosen people. Such a sense of selfhood surely marks the United States and other Christian nations as apart from those ruled by secular Enlightenment ideology. Their “selfhood” is defined by relationship with others.

Sacrament, as it surfaces in Tocqueville’s reflections most substantially in the form of penance and sacrificial living, further suggests that America is Catholic through the re-personalization of duty. The American call for equality before the law imitates the Catholic call to the confessional. Tocqueville writes, for example, that democratic republics are better served by Christians than any other people, as it is the faith “most favorable to equality [as well as liberty].”<sup>19</sup> Do Christians only *tolerate* equality and relationship, or

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<sup>16</sup> Weber, *GEH*, 361.

<sup>17</sup> Tocqueville, *PC*, 469.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 471-472.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 469.



pursue them as a duty? Tocqueville observes, “Only the religion of Jesus Christ has placed the sole grandeur of man in the accomplishment of duties, where each person can attain it; and has been so pleased to consecrate poverty and hardship, as something nearly divine.”<sup>20</sup> While Tocqueville criticizes the extremism of Catholicism’s preference for poverty and reverence for hardship, he fails to connect the dissatisfaction and jealousy he reads in Americans’ response to inequality with the Calvinist source that Weber observes. In fact, he entirely underestimates the impact of denominationalism on the United States. The multiplication of denominations is not a harmless widening of ideologies and has social and political consequences.

Jumping to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, German thinker Wilhem Röpke takes care to distinguish Catholics from Protestants, and Protestants discontented with the Reformation from the rest. Why might it matter whether the United States is a Protestant or Catholic nation, and not just a Christian one, especially if she does show, as Tocqueville claims, “How useful and natural religion is to man, since the country where today it exercises the most dominion is at the same time the most enlightened and free?”<sup>21</sup> Röpke’s charge against division and denominations including Catholicism seems to be the same as that which Tocqueville levels at European associations. The “moral force” of these political associations, Tocqueville writes, is diminished by their passive obedience to dogma; “by uniting together, they have at one stroke made the complete sacrifice of their judgment and free will.”<sup>22</sup> This also echoes Weber’s synopsis of the Calvinist critique of Catholicism. It is possible that Röpke also charges the Catholic Church with suppression of reason and the preservation of outdated, stilted

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Tocqueville, *PC*, 473.

<sup>22</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, “Of Political Association in the United States,” in *Democracy in America*, ed. Eduardo Nolla (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 2010), 311-12. Hereafter cited *PA*.

ideals. However, Tocqueville's best defense of association and democracy in general echoes the Catholic response to the suggestion that the Church has done away with reason: in America, "no one sacrifices his will and his reason; but his will and his reason are applied to making the common enterprise succeed."

It seems likely that Röpke finds post-Reformation Catholicism unattractive because he does not deem the Catholic Church truly universal. His biography explains this personal attraction toward transcendence: "The tendency of my thought, I can see from a later vantage-point, has always been *international*, seeking to examine the larger relationship between countries, for it was in a crisis of this relationship that my thought began."<sup>23</sup> Catholicism might fail the test of Röpke's wartime political opinion because at that time he was protesting the imperialism, militarism, and nationalism of Germany's "feudal and capitalistic system."<sup>24</sup> Of all these the Church has been found guilty in days past. In time, however, Röpke realized that even socialism denies true internationalism and needs national borders within which to function. The new despot socialism, young Röpke saw, did not better serve the individual than the competition of many private pressure groups.<sup>25</sup> Thus he came to defend economic liberalism, though he never forgave the Church.

Privacy is another point on which Röpke came to prefer liberalism, but, surprisingly, it did not affect his thought on the Church. His reminiscences of his wartime desire to take leave reveals more about his relationship with liberty. What he detested most as a soldier was that he was never alone, could never enjoy privacy. "Looking back on it today," he muses, "I can see that this life of constraint had its compensations, which lay in the human contacts its very inhumanity

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<sup>23</sup> Röpke, *EN*, 228.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 229.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 230.

enforced.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, if Röpke objects to the obedience the Catholic Church demands, he contradicts himself, at least on principle. If we compare the Church with the players of international economics, mustn’t Röpke commit to improving the health of one church—one denomination—if he hopes for the health of the unified Church?<sup>27</sup> If economic laws only work for our benefit if we live in a virtuous human society, and if these virtues are only fostered in small communities as he says,<sup>28</sup> can he afford to remain aloof from denominational distinction?

Röpke proposes in 1959 that the modern man idolizes his reason and capacity for the sciences. “It is as though we had wanted to add to the already existing proofs of God’s existence,” he writes, “a new and finally convincing one: the universal destruction that follows on assuming God’s non-existence.”<sup>29</sup> Many attribute the failings of American politics and economics to this movement away from God. This not only implies that there was once a time the country was near to Him, but also that the faith is more than an ethical system. Röpke continues, “For the Catholic, secure in his faith, this [movement] poses enviably few personal problems.”<sup>30</sup> But if the faith exists on earth in any particular, actualized form, it is the Catholic Church. We might wish, with Röpke, for a Church unaffected by rationalism and undivided by the Reformation, but there is no other. And, as Ross Douthat noted recently, this degradation into rationalism is not the inexorable or permanent end of liberalism and pluralism. He writes that the Founders

created a political order that has been compatible with  
multiple different forms of soft religious hegemony,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>28</sup> Röpke, *EN*, 234.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 236.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

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depending on how you subdivide our history—for instance, a brief Unitarian era, a long Protestant ascendancy, a shorter Protestant-Catholic and then ‘Judeo-Christian’ era, and finally our own period of gnostic power.<sup>31</sup>

To suggest that the United States is in its principles anti-Catholic, no longer or never Christian, is delusional. Where she will go next is, of course, of interest to the faithful, but regardless of the dominant faith, Catholics—in their obedient commitment to leadership, in their doctrine that orders their reason, and in their reverence of sacrament as it is celebrated and lived—can elevate what it means to be American.

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<sup>31</sup> Ross Douthat, “A Gentler Christendom,” *First Things* (June 2022).

# Understanding the Importance of Temporal Identities for an Eternal Soul

*Rebekah Balick\**

**I**N SEEKING SPIRITUAL PERFECTION during one's time on earth, the struggle of properly balancing one's earthly priorities with spiritual matters is a universal and yet oft-neglected aspect of a religious believer's daily life. While a concern for people of all faiths, Catholics in particular often face confusion about this balance due to the Catholic understanding of vocation and the belief that in heaven, temporal roles will pass away along with earthly and bodily concerns. When discerning how to balance "earthly" commitments and spiritual obligations, a faithful person may well question to what extent he owes his time to things that are temporal—for example, ties to family, country, or community. If the only identity that will last beyond this life is that as a child of God, then what is the purpose of investing in other identities—as a father, sister, American, Democrat, or pianist—in this life? Especially regarding national identity, many Catholics question the necessity of engaging in political life if the modern nation state is merely a man-made institution that will not extend beyond our temporal existence. However, just as one's familial identity matters in the pursuit of salvation, national identities—though temporal—matter greatly to the everlasting salvation of the soul. Their temporal nature and inferiority when contrasted with one's ultimate identity in God does not lessen their importance; rather, these identities are vital to salvation and necessary to the fulfillment of one's vocation.

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The question of which identities continue in importance after death is hinted at in the Gospels, when the Sadducees approached Christ to inquire about the resurrection. Asked about which of a widow's seven successive husbands would be her husband after death, Jesus responds that the Sadducees do not understand the nature of the resurrection and says that in heaven, "they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels."<sup>1</sup> St. Paul expresses a similar idea in Galatians when he writes that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>2</sup> These statements suggest that marital, national, social, and sexual identities are confined to the temporal and do not matter in light of the common identity as members of Christ's body, which makes one wonder if there is a purpose in identifying with these bonds in our earthly lives. However, closer examination of the state of the human person reveals that such an interpretation is a misunderstanding of mankind's place in the world and is mistaken as well about the nature of human relationships. Firstly, there are certainly identities that are conferred onto humans through nature, meaning they are thus indisputably willed by God. Secondly, by understanding the necessity of those identities conferred by nature, we can then see the importance of identities that appear more conventional, or "man-made," such as nationhood, and understand that these bonds, which work for the good of the person and his or her soul, are also willed by God for human flourishing.

At the start of a human's existence, God creates the soul of the person united to the body, and this soul constitutes the immortal part of the human composite.<sup>3</sup> Since the soul is the eternal part, it is true that the identity of the soul as a child of God is a person's first and most important identity. In light of this, St. Paul's statement above

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:30 NRSV-CE.

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 3:28.

<sup>3</sup> Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012, 336.

contains a great truth; membership in the body of Christ is the identity that unites all baptized men and women regardless of birth or origin, and it should be the ultimate identity driving all that we do. Yet the body also is indisputably part of man's existence, and it is the body that grounds a person within the bounds of time, in one place and location. The reality of the body confers what might be called "temporal" identities, such as familial relations and bodily sex, to humans living in this condition. These are clearly intended by God to be a part of man's existence even if they do not carry the same significance in heaven.

The first identity that man assumes at conception is the familial bond. A person does not come into the world independently, but through a mother and a father, and is thus united to a particular bloodline and group of individuals more so than any other. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to the family as the "original cell of social life," recognizing its unique place as the first community through which a human being experiences the world and all that it has to offer.<sup>4</sup> That the family identity is willed by God and not a man-made construct is clear; the existence of the fourth commandment (to honor one's father and mother) alone reveals that familial identity is holy and encouraged, and it is but one of many examples from the life of Christ and Church teaching. Like the seven marriages of the woman referenced in Matthew, these family ties become moot once the soul is fulfilled in heaven and no longer in need of these ties to help it reach sanctification. Yet they still uniquely shape a person's earthly experience and thus his eternal soul. The fact that God wills us into a family first and foremost, and demands respect be paid to that family, shows us that an identity as a father, mother, son, daughter, or other relative is one which we are bound to respect even if those bonds of blood are bequeathed by the temporal body.

Another identity that is bequeathed on an individual by nature at birth is one's sexual identity. Genesis states that mankind was created

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<sup>4</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., 2207.

“male and female” and conferred a sex by God that is manifested in the body.<sup>5</sup> Rather than diminishing this identity, the Church has stated that “everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity” as it is revealed in his or her body.<sup>6</sup> Again, the differences between the sexes mean very little in comparison with the fact that all human beings are equal in the body of Christ, hence St. Paul’s statement regarding the insignificance of the male and the female. However, it is still important to respect the sexual identity manifested in the body one was born into and not to disregard its importance simply because it pales in comparison to one’s place in the greater body of Christ or because the soul is separated from the body after death. Rather, the Church makes clear that one’s sexual identity is inextricably tied to one’s vocation and thus of extreme importance to the formation of the soul.

These two examples show that there are certain identities which, though temporal, are nonetheless given to us by God in order to fulfill his plan for us in the world. Filial duties and sexual identity, though bestowed through the temporal body and ordered primarily towards temporal realities, are nonetheless important to our spiritual fulfillment and still relevant in the life after death. Would it make sense for Christ, who honored his mother above all other women, to admit into heaven someone who had neglected his family on the grounds that his relationship with them did not matter because it was a relationship of blood only? Or to dismiss a person’s rejection of or harm towards his or her body when that body will once again be united with the soul after the Last Judgment? The teachings of Christ and the Church clearly demonstrate that it would be foolish to say that these identities do not matter just because the body of Christ is the greatest identity. These two examples demonstrate identities that, because they are visibly present in one’s God-given body, cannot be denied. If we

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:27.

<sup>6</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., 2333.



accept that God wishes us to take these identities seriously, we can then explore what other identities should demand our attention while living here on earth.

After accepting the importance of these identities, we can then consider the proper place of identities that are not inherently conferred by God through nature via the body—particularly national identities. What does it matter, one might ask, if one identifies as an American and partakes in American political life if that identity is arbitrary in the sight of God? Especially when the modern political climate appears corrupt and inefficient, one might rightly wonder at the purpose of a national identity in one’s spiritual formation. Pope Paul VI and the Second Vatican Council address this question in the encyclical *Gaudium et spes*, in which the Council Fathers seek to explain the importance of the temporal things in preparation for the eternal. The Council maintains that “there are, indeed, close links between earthly things and those elements of man’s condition which transcend the world.”<sup>7</sup> It is true that “man’s horizons are not limited only to the temporal order” and that greater things lie beyond our present reality. Yet it is also true that man is “living in the context of human history,” and it is in living life within that context that “he preserves intact his eternal vocation.”<sup>8</sup> If this is the case, then it is necessary for an individual to identify with the place in which he finds himself and seek to live out his particular vocation in connection with that context. We know that political communities are meant to be part of that context because they “are founded on [communal] human nature and hence belong to the order designed by God” rather than being solely inventions of fallen man.<sup>9</sup> While some aspects of the modern nation state are severely

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<sup>7</sup> Paul VI, *Gaudium et spes*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, December 7, 1965, sec. 76, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Paul VI, *Gaudium et spes*, sec. 74.

tainted by fallen human nature and sin, the concept of a political community is not an evil one. These communities provide context for living out God's will, and as an outgrowth of man's communal nature, we can infer that they are willed by God to be part of earthly life.

Is there a concern that identifying as a particular nationality and living in accordance with that might hinder one's ability to live for God alone? Not at all. Christ legitimized living out a national identity when he told the Pharisees to "repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."<sup>10</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas expands on this principle when he includes loyalty to country as a necessity in his description of piety, saying that "it belongs to piety...to show reverence to one's parents and one's country."<sup>11</sup> The connection between familial identity and national identity is clear; just as one is born into a family and connected to that time and space, he or she is also born into a particular country and connected to that identity. Bradley Lewis summarizes this well when he states that "national identity...reflects the embodied and time-bound nature of our human condition, but...points beyond itself to our home beyond family and country."<sup>12</sup> Part of God's plan in setting individuals within the context of a family is so that through that family, parents may communicate to their children virtues and lessons about the world. The nation, Lewis states, does a similar thing by communicating "what it has in virtue of its particular resources and history."<sup>13</sup> One is born to a particular land according to God's will in the same way that one is born to a particular

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<sup>10</sup> Matt. 22:21.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1911-1925), IIa-IIae, q. 101, a. 1.

<sup>12</sup> V. Bradley Lewis, "Is Nationalism Consistent with the Catholic Faith?" National Catholic Register, August 6, 2019, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/is-nationalism-consistent-with-the-catholic-faith>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

family, and the growth gained as a citizen of a particular place is an extension of the growth gained by an identity with a family. In this way, then, patriotism for one land above others can be understood as a virtue.

In fact, one can argue that it is impossible to conceive of an identity as a child of God until one first learns identity in other sources. Identifying as a child of God requires sacrifice, justice, patience, and goodwill towards all members of the human race. However, one first learns these things through the family and community into which one is born. A person must learn generosity and justice in a local community first before it can be extended to everyone, and one has to learn identity in the family and in a nation in order to fully understand what it means to have an identity in God. In other words, to conceive of what it means to be a member of the kingdom of God, one must first conceive of what it means to be a member of a kingdom. In this way, a national identity is an extension of the principle of subsidiarity, and it is not in violation of global solidarity or the necessity of caring for each other. Rather, national identity establishes ties between people in a certain geographical area who would otherwise have no reason to be associated and thus motivates harmony and community. National identity exists somewhere in between familial identity and identity with the whole of mankind in terms of the order of loyalties and provides unique opportunities for service and fellowship. As *Gaudium et spes* states, “the political community exists for the sake of the common good,” and acting as a member of that community helps fulfill that good in a unique way.<sup>14</sup>

Given this, to what extent should these identities be a part of the Catholic’s day-to-day living? Should he partake in politics, for example, or remove himself from that sphere in an understanding that his American identity will not extend beyond his time on earth? Some have taken John 15:19 about how Christians “are not of the world” to mean

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<sup>14</sup> Paul VI, *Gaudium et spes*, 74.

that worldly matters such as national politics should not concern us. Yet this is the wrong conclusion. Christians may not be “of the world,” but we are certainly in the world, and as such we must inhabit the world in a way that respects our higher vocation. National identity is a duty through which God often calls upon human beings to exercise their virtue, spread their values, and fulfill their vocation. The Church states that “all Christians must be aware of their own specific vocation within the political community” and act accordingly.<sup>15</sup> Of course, this will look different for each individual, and some will be called to serve that nation in far more radical or committed ways than others. Yet at the very least, one should never be afraid of identifying with a particular national identity for the purpose of continuing to sanctify that land, and it can be argued that there is a sacred obligation to the country as there is an obligation to the family. Things like voting, paying attention to politics, learning the country’s history, and celebrating its holidays are important practices of piety. They allow one to recognize the unique goods that the nation state provides, such as wider sharing of resources, security from threats, and judicial justice. Additionally, especially in the Western world, they provide a context through which the individual can bring about the institution of laws and practices that promote human flourishing and help perfect the defects of that country. No nation is perfect, in the same way that no family is perfect, and yet the call to virtue in a national context remains.

That political communities have cultural identities that look very different is not a detriment, but rather a strength of humanity, and a reflection of the infinite variety of the divine. Think of the human body—the many parts look different, but work in harmony, and no one begrudges them their physical differences since these differences are integral to the uniqueness of that part’s task. Likewise, the fact that different cultures and nationalities have aesthetic and cultural differences is to be honored as both a reflection of God’s infinite

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<sup>15</sup> Paul VI, *Gaudium et spes*, 75.

variety and mankind's creativity, each recognized for the role it must play. Again, there is no disputing that some of these variations do not contribute to human flourishing; one needs only to scratch the surface of history to find cultural customs that violate human life and sacredness. Yet this only means that worldly cultures are in need of sanctifying—the Western world's cultures included—so that they can reflect God as they were intended to, and this can only be achieved by members of its community who care about the sacred goal of that culture.

One glaring question remains: what kind of duty does an individual have to nations or cultures that are entirely morally reprehensible, such as the Nazi regime or the Chinese Communist Party? This question is difficult to answer in its entirety, but in the context of this essay, it is important to keep in mind the idea of order and balance in one's priorities. Piety towards the nation is a holy thing; however, it should never come before man's relationship with his family or, more importantly, his God. If a nation state is engaging in behavior that is in direct violation of God's plan, then it is the duty of the citizen to condemn that behavior even if it means arrest, protest, or legal action. This action, in that context, should be seen as loyalty towards the higher calling of the nation rather than loyalty to its fallen state. In the same way that piety towards one's family does not mean accepting abuse from that family, love of country does not and never should include justification of abuses. Additionally, one should certainly never feel guilty for physically leaving a country to prioritize and preserve his safety or that of his family if the need arises. Piety towards one's country, like any virtue, is subject to defect on the one hand and excess on the other. In cases of excessive nationalism, citizens must remember that love of country should never be confused with worship of country, and any ideology that places the nation at the top of one's priorities is badly conceived. While love of nation is both good and necessary, it must be acted upon with temperance and

balance and ordered in its proper place beneath God and family in the hierarchy of man's loyalties.

It was ultimately Christ who showed Christians the importance of identifying with a particular sex, family, and nation while on earth as well as the proper way to live these out. His identity was still that of the Son of God when he became man. Yet in the Incarnation, he took on a human nature, a body with its sex, was born into the family line of David, a member of the Jewish nation, and an obedient participant in all of these. By "willingly obeying the laws of his country, [Christ] sanctified those human ties, especially family ones, which are the source of social structures" and gave us an example of how to live properly in the time and place in which we are born.<sup>16</sup> Taking his life as an example, we can see how identity with a particular place and people is vitally important to our growth and flourishing as humans as well as our ability to live our vocations. Furthermore, Christ remains both man and son of Mary in heaven in addition to his other "identity" as God; similarly in us, the presence of a higher calling does not in any way diminish the identities born to us on earth. We see in Christ's life the perfect example of how to be a son, a man, and a Jew while still knowing that the ultimate identity is in one's relationship with God. So long as that identity remains rightly ordered above all others, taking on temporal identities and living them out is both necessary and virtuous.

Thus, one can see that temporal identities do in fact matter and will continue to matter in eternity, and no one should be afraid of adhering to them so long as they do not hinder one's ability to live as a child of God. Rather than temporal identities becoming meaningless in eternity, heaven sanctifies and perfects those identities that diversify our daily lives. The experiences of the body are retained in the soul, and thus the mark of the love from familial and societal relationships remains on the soul even after death until the soul is reunited with the resurrected body. Because all human relationships and imperfections

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<sup>16</sup> Paul VI, *Gaudium et spes*, 32.

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are perfected in the experience of heaven, we may well reason that the presence of God will perfect and complete national relationships as well as familial ones. The particular joys of one's homeland ought to be protected, prided in, and shared with others so that all can revel in the infinite wonder of God's creation and the blessings he bestows during our time on earth.





# Combating the Trend to Be Human Only During Time-Off of Work

*Michaella Maniscalco\**

LEISURE IS NOT MERE IDLENESS, BUT A VITAL participation in reality. Leisure activities are good in themselves and are chosen for their own sake, as opposed to being instrumental to other goods. As such, leisure is essential to our humanity and to our culture. Without it, we lose the beauty of the arts, genuine intimacy in human relations, and the place of God in our day-to-day lives. As Josef Pieper, German philosopher and author of *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, puts it, true leisure is a “condition of the soul.”<sup>1</sup> Echoing Pieper’s thought, C.S. Lewis beautifully says:

Human life means to me the life of beings for whom the leisure activities of thought, art, literature, conversation are the end, and the preservation and propagation of life merely the means.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary American culture has a flawed tendency to partition leisure and work. In our conception, work is a set of duties we perform in an office from 9-to-5 and leisure is unstructured time we have on the weekends. This view—that leisure is defined by the absence of obligation rather than by higher ends—cheapens the

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<sup>1</sup> Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 18.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Rehabilitation and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 89.

dignity of work and makes genuine leisure almost unattainable. Taking Josef Pieper's higher understanding of leisure, I am going to argue that even "work"—understood as employment for compensation—can and should be conducted *leisurely*. That is: human flourishing requires silence and contemplation in order to discover what is true about the world, and this cannot be achieved either by continuous occupation on the job nor by frenzied and distracting entertainment. But we could find our work more satisfying were we to approach it, where possible, with a deeper appreciation of its beauty and meaning.

### *A Disengaged Workforce*

One understanding of work is that it is the preparatory action that makes leisure possible. One cannot enjoy the beauty of a garden that was never planted. One cannot read a favorite book without first learning how to read. Where employment is concerned, "work" is activity for which we receive wages, which in turn make possible many other goods necessary for human flourishing. Without negating this view, work has an even deeper meaning when seen in immaterial terms. Through work, we are participating in God's commandment to Adam to have dominion over the Garden. We become participants in God's act of creation through work, because through our efforts we bring things into being while developing our skills, talents, and the social virtues that grow when we work with others. It's because of these things that Pope St. John Paul II, in his encyclical, *Laborem exercens*, describes participating in work as a means of becoming more human.<sup>3</sup>

Yet do workers experience work as the process of becoming more human? More than a third of them do not. The Gallup corporation has been tracking employee engagement since 2000 by measuring the percentage of people in the U.S. that are "engaged" at work and the percentage that are "actively disengaged." "Engagement" is a measure

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<sup>3</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 9.

of an employee's sense of commitment and connection to the employer. An "actively disengaged" worker is one who believes he has miserable working conditions, is poorly managed, and is seeking new employment. In 2021, Gallup found that workforce engagement has stayed roughly the same as in 2020 with only 36% of the U.S. workforce engaged in their work and workplace.<sup>4</sup> The percentage of actively disengaged employees increased from 14% to 15% from 2020 to 2021.<sup>5</sup>

A disengaged workforce is antithetical to what I am calling a leisurely approach to work in three ways. First, a disengaged worker is not choosing something for its own sake. Of course most of us work in order to provide for ourselves and our families. But this does not mean that the activity itself cannot be meaningful and even enjoyable to the participant. We can be proud of our contributions to bringing an excellent or beautiful product or service into being. A disengaged workforce is characterized in part by being motivated solely by a paycheck, with a loss of hope that work can be enjoyable for them.

Secondly, a disengaged worker does not engage beyond the sphere of needs and wants. Leisure allows man to engage in the "quintessence of all the natural goods of the world and of those gifts and qualities which...lie beyond the immediate sphere of his needs and wants."<sup>6</sup> Leisurely action and thought orient one to truth, goodness, and beauty. For a brief moment or perhaps for hours, the "leisurely" worker is not begrudgingly completing assigned tasks but is caught up in the beauty of their work. The right task can become meaningful or even fun. A disengaged worker, however, focuses on how the job will provide for their needs and wants without further consideration.

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<sup>4</sup>Jim Harter, "U.S. Employee Engagement Data Hold Steady in First Half of 2021," available at <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/352949/employee-engagement-holds-steady-first-half-2021.aspx>.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Pieper, *Leisure*, 16.

*Combating the Trend to be Human Only During Time-Off of Work*

Finally, a disengaged worker removes himself from reality. Instead of entering into their work, disengaged workers are not invested in their actions and are therefore to that extent not participants in the truth of the world.

In all these ways, worker disengagement is a failure to recognize or uphold the dignity of work that Pope St. John Paul II describes. Not only is work meant to provide for families' material needs and to advance science and technology and other social goods, but it is most importantly "to elevate unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which [the worker] lives in community with those who belong to the same family."<sup>7</sup>

A disengaged workforce poses a significant problem for a culture worthy of the human person. Culture, Pieper notes, "depends for its very existence on leisure."<sup>8</sup> From Pope St. John Paul II we hear that the ultimate purpose of work is to elevate the cultural and moral level of society. From Pieper, we learn that it is leisure that is fundamental to culture. Instead of viewing the two understandings of culture independently, let us consider where the views of these Catholic philosophers intersect and how by "leisurely working," culture can be grown and sustained.

*Harms to the Human Person*

The harms resulting from disengaged work are both material and spiritual. To start with the material harm, disengaged workers are spending the majority of their day in a work environment that does not interest them, doing seemingly pointless tasks. The average person will spend 90,000 hours of his or her life working. It seems preferable to spend 90,000 hours doing something enjoyable or at least worthwhile rather than to spend 90,000 hours doing something dreary for a

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<sup>7</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Pieper, *Leisure*, 15.

paycheck solely (without the goods that can accompany work such as developing virtues and skills, camaraderie, and the sense of satisfaction). Further, disengaged workers may be failing to invest and develop their own talents. In the parable of the talents, Jesus tells of three servants whose employer has entrusted them with different amounts of money before he leaves on a journey. When the master returns, two servants receive praise for putting their talents to work and earning more. But the third servant is chastised as a “wicked and slothful servant” for simply burying the talents he was given.<sup>9</sup> A popular interpretation of this parable is that talents represent gifts we have been given and we should use our gifts to multiply them. St. Teresa of Calcutta beautifully explains that our work comes from God and is for Him:

Remember, that work is his. You are his co-worker. Therefore, he depends on you for that special work. Do the work with him, and the work will be done for him. The talents God has given you are not yours—they have been given to you for your use, for the glory of God. There can be no half-measures in the work.<sup>10</sup>

The vastly more important harms of working without a leisurely attitude are the spiritual repercussions to the human person. The end of work without leisure is merely material gains that cannot satisfy the human person. A spiritual being must be oriented to a spiritual end in order to flourish. By observation, we see that people are drawn to the good and the beautiful in other people, art, literature, and music. The love of beauty requires us to go outside of ourselves and contemplate the nature of other things. There is something within us as persons that moves us to desire beauty. It is this desire for beauty that

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 25:14-30.

<sup>10</sup> St. Teresa of Calcutta, edited by Brother Angelo Devananda. *Total Surrender*. (Ann Arbor Michigan: Servant Publications), 1985, 72.

dynamically inserts meaning into our lives and into all of existence. Ultimately, the meaning of politics, academics, family, and friendship is to know and contemplate the good. Leisure is a spiritual activity because it is what lifts us into the good, the true, and the beautiful. Without it, our spiritual needs are left wanting. Our lives would be meaningless if we were to believe that there is nothing greater than getting off work, collecting our paychecks, and then spending them. The spiritual ends that we were created for are not meant to be discovered during our time-off or on the weekend solely, but must be infused into our daily lives. We were not made to be human only when we are off the clock; instead every action should make us more human.

### *Working Leisurely*

Working with a leisurely attitude may sound like either a nice but impractical thought or perhaps even an oxymoron. The relationship between work and leisure must be aptly understood before we explore how we can become more “leisurely” workers. For the reasons explored above, we should aspire to perform work with a leisurely attitude when possible. But sometimes work will be simply work. Pieper paraphrases Aristotle saying, “We are ‘unleisurely’ in order to have leisure.”<sup>11</sup> Sometimes work will be preparatory and is an intermediary step for leisure to be pursued. As we have seen, one must commit to work in order to enjoy the beauty of the world more. A Catholic must memorize the responses in mass to participate more fully. Musicians must learn their scales before they can master a great piece of music. It is more difficult to turn a repetitive task such as data entry into something as enjoyable as a beautiful symphony.

Even so, the fact that some tasks are difficult to render beautiful does not mean there are not many opportunities for us to have a mindset shift in how we approach work. Work itself can be treated

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<sup>11</sup> Pieper, *Leisure*, 5.

leisurely. A group of college students studying literature and philosophy should not hyperfixate on getting good grades, for example. The purpose of studying the liberal arts is not to receive a top grade but to find joy in the learning and beauty in the truth. If students only ever considered their readings and class discussions as work without room for leisure, then they would be failing their vocations as students to love the learning itself. In the same way, a workplace will necessarily have their performance evaluations and deadlines. But that does not mean we cannot find what is engaging and beautiful in our work.

The Benedictine motto, *Ora et Labora*, meaning to *pray and to work*, is a profound testament to how leisure and work can live in harmony. Prayer comes first as it is necessary to satisfy our needs as spiritual creatures, but work cannot be forgotten. The Benedictines do not say *pray or work*. Rather, a life must be lived with both prayer and work.

#### *Suggestions for Implementation*

Let us conclude with four practical steps to strive for a life that approaches work with a leisurely disposition. First: work in silence. Leisure is a “form of silence, of that silence which is the prerequisite of the apprehension of reality.”<sup>12</sup> There is a reason that it is considered rude to be on one’s phone while at a theater production. Distractions, like listening to rowdy music or a podcast, may in many circumstances prohibit the worker from fully engaging with their work.

Second: know yourself. When we think of genuine leisure, we tend to think of the artist. Painters, musicians, authors, sculptors first know themselves and what sparks their creativity and then seek to pursue beauty. In the same way, we ought to know ourselves well enough to discern what employment will best enable us to find beauty in our work.

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<sup>12</sup>Pieper, *Leisure*, 46.

Third: identify aspects of work that involve creation. One of the pinnacle reasons that work has dignity is that it participates in creation. Pope St. John Paul II says, “At the beginning of man’s work is the mystery of creation.”<sup>13</sup> Even organizing a supply room is creating order out of chaos. If we look for them, we can find ways to make even ordinary tasks an expression of our creativity.

Finally, re-claim Sunday for leisure. Genesis 2:3 says, “So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”<sup>14</sup> With the work week, it is easy to fall into the feeling that Sunday is simply the day before Monday. Sunday quickly turns into the preparation day for the work week. In order to pursue an attitude of leisure throughout the rest of the week, one must experience leisure in worship and rest on Sunday. Pieper in fact argues that the ultimate form of leisure is the sacrifice of the holy mass because it is in the mass that we are participating most fully in truth, goodness, and beauty.

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<sup>13</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 2:3.



# The Rhapsodic Theater and Karol Wojtyła: Anti-Nazi Occupational Theater Movement in Poland

*Reed McLean\**

A COMMON MISCONCEPTION ABOUT THEATER is that it is merely for entertainment and aesthetic purposes. Plays and performances were indeed used as an instrument of amusement for royalty during medieval times. However, entertainment is not the only purpose of theater. Even earlier in history, performances in Ancient Greece were a form of worship to please the gods. Drama can be used to explore pressing ethical and social issues as well; it can also be used to express national identity. During the rise and reign of the Third Reich in Nazi Germany, all aspects of life were controlled and manipulated to establish *Volksgemeinschaft*, or a purely German ethnonational demographic. The Nazis explicitly propagandized theater to advance their *volkisch* motives. The same totalitarian laws applied in Poland after the Nazi invasion in 1939, as all aspects of Polish identity—religion, language, arts, etc.—were suppressed in order to propel the Nazi’s *volkisch* agenda. In response, artists and political activists in Poland organized an underground theater movement that used drama to reaffirm their pre-Nazi identity as Nazi-sponsored theater and the Nazi prohibition on most independent theater worked to change Polish identity. This paper will analyze how The Rhapsodic Theater in Poland used drama as a form

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of oppositional warfare against their suppressors, ultimately using truth to defeat the tyrants.

Manipulation was a central tactic for the Nazis to establish a national German, or *Volksgemeinschaft*, identity.<sup>1</sup> The Nazis wielded propaganda in all aspects of life as a means of making the state “pure.” Theater was especially centralized, purged of Jews, and regulated by the notorious Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of the Ministry of Enlightenment and Propaganda throughout Germany. One scholar of the time testifies: “A leading magazine—*Die Bühne*—was Nazified, and a deluge of propaganda proclaimed the necessity of a completely new theater with [*volkisch*] values and entirely purified of Jewish-plutocratic-democratic-communistic decadence.”<sup>2</sup> Goebbels thought that Nazi entertainment should be “non-sentimental, manly, and heroic in tone and show ‘steel-hard’ romanticism.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, not only was authentic, true expression censored in drama, but theater was also supposed to serve as an outlet for the *volkisch* utopia that the Nazis wanted to portray. Moreover, Propaganda Minister Goebbels believed that drama had to “create a soothing sense of stability, and promote the solidity of the regime.”<sup>4</sup> Basically, state-sanctioned theater in Nazi Germany had a fundamental role in promoting its own ideals for national identity.

In “The Theater of Ideology in Nazi Germany,” Bruce Zortman introduces *Thingspiel*, which was a form of Nazi theater that was performed outdoors: “*Thingspiel* was not only intended to develop a national drama that was German to the ‘core,’ but it was also to act as a political gathering place for the nation where the ideology could be

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<sup>1</sup> Welch, “Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft: Constructing a People’s Community,” 213.

<sup>2</sup> Bentley, “The German Theater since 1933,” 329.

<sup>3</sup> Gadberry, “theater in the Third Reich, the Prewar Years: Essays on theater in Nazi Germany,” 167.

<sup>4</sup> Gadberry, 167.

expounded.”<sup>5</sup> Essentially, *Thingspiel* was established as a large public space for members of the Nazi Socialist Party to gather and promulgate their ideas. In addition to *Thingspiel*, the Nazis also established festivals and other forms of theater to establish a *volkisch* state: “[The] first Reich Theater Festival in Vienna meant a magnificent display of German acting. Second only to these festivals, the Hitler Youth Festivals and the provincial (Gau) festivals have practically become schools of dramaturgy.”<sup>6</sup> Nazi theater employed *Thingspiel* and other theater festivals not only to produce shows that were purely *volkisch*, but also to create a space for their supporters to gather and reinforce their vision of an entirely *volkisch* state.

Access to the dramatic works produced under the Third Reich is limited today because most were ultimately burned and destroyed. However, according to many reputable scholars, Nazi theater failed to produce any important works of live theater because their plays and musicals were not well-received. In Anselm Heinrich’s case study of theater produced in Münster during the reign of the Third Reich, Heinrich finds that “audiences were poor, the number of productions were down, and the quality of the productions [were] criticized by the press.”<sup>7</sup> This being said, Heinrich names three noteworthy effects of Nazi theater: an increase in the production of *volkisch* pieces, the disappearance of left-wing plays, and the banishment of all works by Jewish composers and dramatists. Despite the poor quality of Nazi theater, it was still “part of the Nazi organization” and used as a means to create a purely German state. Even though Nazi theater was not highly acclaimed, the fact that the Nazis used theater to influence public thinking and propel their eugenics movement should not be overlooked.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Zortman, “The Theater of Ideology in Nazi Germany,” 154.

<sup>6</sup> Bentley, “The German Theater since 1933,” 330.

<sup>7</sup> Heinrich, “Shakespeare and Kolbenheyer: Regional theater during the Third Reich – A Case Study,” 5.

<sup>8</sup> Bentley, “The German Theater since 1933,” 332.

The influence of the Nazi Socialist Party extended far beyond the borders of Germany. After the Nazi invasion of 1939, Poland was partitioned and occupied by Hitler's Third Reich and Stalin's Soviet Union. Poland would remain under their control until 1945 (when a Communist government beholden to the USSR would be installed), and the Nazi regime would assume total control of "every individual and of all societal institutions, in all aspects of life, ideological views, activities, works, and religious beliefs."<sup>9</sup> Of course, theater was no exception: "All forms of Polish artistic theater were prohibited by the Nazis."<sup>10</sup> Only cabarets and vulgar comedies were permitted, and all had to serve Nazi propaganda purposes. Furthermore, "anyone who explicitly and consistently resisted Nazi propaganda risked public defamation, disenfranchisement, and persecution as an 'enemy of the state' or an 'enemy of the people.'"<sup>11</sup> As a result, the Nazis severely affected Polish theater in terms of what they banned and what they permitted.

The suppression of artistic and other forms of expression by the Nazis gravely jeopardized what it meant to be Polish. theater was uniquely central to Polish culture and identity:

Polish theater had a strong and long-lived history of being an important element of the national culture and of the nation's spiritual life. It had developed within a millennium-long tradition in a mainly Catholic country, cultivating values of freedom, independence, individualism, multi-nationalism, and tolerance.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Braun, "Religious Theater in Poland Under Totalitarianism," 299.

<sup>10</sup> Braun, 303.

<sup>11</sup> "The 'Volk Community': The Germans Between Devotion to the Führer, Everyday Life, and Terror."

<sup>12</sup> Braun, "Religious Theater in Poland Under Totalitarianism," 301.

Essentially, there was a dialectical relationship between theater and the rich Catholic faith that fostered the “strongholds of Polish identity and repositories of the national spirit.”<sup>13</sup> Given the deep influence of theater and Catholicism on the culture and identity of Poland, it is comprehensible as to why an oppositional movement in Poland utilized theater to combat the totalitarian motives of the Nazis.<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, theater became a shelter from totalitarianism and a sanctuary for oppositional artists.<sup>15</sup> Because artistic and religious activities were among the many forms of expression that were prohibited by the Nazis, a unique bond developed between the faithful and artists. Both religious celebrations and plays were produced behind the closed doors of Catholic seminaries, monasteries, universities, and some amateur companies. From this, a “large network of underground (illegal) theaters, including clandestine productions, acting studies, playwriting, criticism, and theater scholarship” developed in which such cultural activities were conducted underground in “the most primitive conditions, in basements and attics.”<sup>16</sup> Theater, especially the underground theater network, was instrumental in maintaining the Polish identity, as it directly contradicted the efforts of the Nazi regime.

Of the eight hundred underground theater groups established in Poland, The Rhapsodic Theater was the most notable. According to James Torrens, The Rhapsodic Theater was co-founded by Karol Wojtyła and his mentor Mieczysław Kotlarczyk as “an island of humanity” and a church of sorts, where the national spirit of Poland could flourish.<sup>17</sup> The Rhapsodic Theater had its own set of strict customs that directly opposed those of Nazi theater. Necessarily, the

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<sup>13</sup> Braun, 301.

<sup>14</sup> Meyer, “A Theocentric Vision of Culture in John Paul II.”

<sup>15</sup> Braun, 304.

<sup>16</sup> Fass, “Theatrical Activities in the Polish Ghettos during the Years 1939-1942,” 54-5.

<sup>17</sup> Taborski, *The Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, 5.

productions were extremely simple in regard to costumes, sets, and other artistic elements. Essentially, productions were held in attics, “where a stage was set up with a curtain. Pillows and tablecloths were used as decorations with kerosene lamps for lighting. Benches were set up in the hall.... They would also see that no undesirable [German] guests would come.”<sup>18</sup> Due to the little emphasis on the visual production elements, The Rhapsodic Theater was known as “a theater of ‘the living word.’”<sup>19</sup> Emphasizing the spoken word of the play rather than the scenery, costumes, makeup, etc. was considered highly experimental; however, “the realities of the war made the experiment more precise.”<sup>20</sup> While it was necessary to minimize the visual aspects of productions because of the legal implications, The Rhapsodic Theater also centered the meaning of its plays on the spoken word by design. The focus on the text was central to achieve Wojtyła’s and Kotlarczyk’s objective, which was to maintain a Polish national identity:

This theater, in which there is so much word and relatively little “acting,” safeguards young actors against developing a destructive individualism because it will not let them impose on the text anything of their own.... A group of people collectively, somehow unanimously, evoke ethical associations; this solidarity of people in the word reveals particularly strongly and accentuates the reverence that is the point departure for the rhapsodist’s work and the secret of their style.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Fass, “Theatrical Activities in the Polish Ghettos during the Years 1939-1942,” 55.

<sup>19</sup> Taborski, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Taborski, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Taborski, 12.

Thus, The Rhapsodic Theater utilized its unique circumstances—mostly the need for secrecy and a lack of resources—and emphasized the spoken word over other production elements to uphold its ideological values and ultimately to combat totalitarianism.

The Rhapsodic Theater officially began its activities in 1941 under the direction of co-founders Mieczyslaw Kotlarczyk (1908-1978) and Karol Wojtyła (1920-2005). Kotlarczyk graduated from the Jagiellonian University in 1936 with his Ph.D. in early theater criticism in Poland, Germany, and France. Wojtyła's friendship with Kotlarczyk was "the mainspring" of his passion for being involved in theater and the foundation for The Rhapsodic Theater.<sup>22</sup> Wojtyła's involvement in theater began early in his life, at the young age of eight years old. Before becoming a priest and ultimately Pope John Paul II, Wojtyła seriously considered a career as an actor and playwright: while studying at the Jagiellonian University, Wojtyła's friends maintained that "he was then thinking of the theater as his calling and was studying literature to give himself the necessary background."<sup>23</sup> In Wojtyła's first year at university, he gave public readings, was an avid theatergoer, and was involved with a semi-professional theater group in Kraków. However, upon the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939, Wojtyła's life "radically changed."<sup>24</sup> In Kraków, the city was saturated with German officers, police, and a guard unit known as the Saal-Schutz (SS). The high level of security meant that all the participants would have been killed immediately if any religious celebrations or theatrical productions had been discovered. Thus, virtually all religious and theatrical activities occurring during this time occurred underground "in private homes before small audiences, without scenery or costumes."<sup>25</sup>

Karol Wojtyła's plays served as his means of resistance to Poland's occupying forces because the fusion of Polish culture with Christian

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<sup>22</sup> Taborski, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Taborski, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Taborski, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Taborski, 4.

scripture was an extremely illegal and dangerous tactic.<sup>26</sup> According to Father John McNerney, a distinguished Irish scholar in residence at The Catholic University of America, Wojtyła utilized the artistic tools available to the artist as being both “diagnostic and therapeutic” in recapturing the reality of the human person: “The war and subsequent experiences of totalitarianism had shattered all confidence in the search for truth.... There was a need for the redemption of man.”<sup>27</sup> In response to the Nazi’s prohibition of any form of expression that affirmed the Polish identity, Wojtyła used drama to speak truth to power.

Of Wojtyła’s works, the plays he wrote during the Nazi-Soviet occupation of Poland include the following: *Job* (1940), *Jeremiah* (1940), and *Our God’s Brother* (1949). These plays were oppositional to the Nazis in three ways. First, Wojtyła’s plays were anti-Nazi because of his fervent emphasis on human dignity and solidarity. In contrast to Nazi plays, which were non-sentimental and emphasized masculinity, the focus of Wojtyła’s *Our God’s Brother* is to “penetrate the man, reaching to the ‘sources of his humanity.’”<sup>28</sup> During a time when “word and language were totally degraded and devalued by ideologies that demanded their subservience to shallow, often inhuman purposes,” Wojtyła filled his plays with words and ideas that affirmed humanity.<sup>29</sup> Second, Wojtyła’s plays were innately oppositional to the occupying Nazi forces because they were written and published in the Polish language. Failing to use the German language was a direct violation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* laws, the consequence of which was death.

Lastly, Wojtyła’s plays were direct acts of political dissent from Nazi ideology because of the extremely controversial incorporation of religious elements. The plays entitled *Job* and *Jeremiah* explicitly refer to books of the Bible, whereas *Our God’s Brother* directly names God in

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<sup>26</sup> Meyer, “A Theocentric Vision of Culture in John Paul II,” 86-7.

<sup>27</sup> McNerney, *John Paul II: Poet and Philosopher*, 103.

<sup>28</sup> Taborski, 152.

<sup>29</sup> Taborski, 16.



the title. In Wojtyła's *Job*, there is an angel with a cup descending on a ray of light to the Garden of Olives, and at the end of the play, there is the outline of Mount Calvary and the Cross.<sup>30</sup> In *Jeremiah*, the play is structured around religious rituals connected with Lent, Holy Week, and Easter.<sup>31</sup> Under the totalitarian occupation of Poland, the state not only controlled the religion and religious practices of the citizens but also actively sought to suppress all manifestations of faith: persecuting existing traditional religious denominations and their members in order to impose atheism on the entire population.<sup>32</sup> Death was the consequence of violating the laws that explicitly prohibited any form of religious expression. Yet, despite these ramifications and the potential loss of his own life, Wojtyła continued to produce his work. In essence, Wojtyła's plays were obvious acts of political dissent that were "surely heard against the propaganda that filled the airwaves of 1940."<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion, as the Nazis propagandized theater and other forms of cultural expression in order to establish their *volkisch* state, artists and political activists in Poland organized an underground theater movement that used drama as a form of oppositional warfare against the Nazis. In order to combat totalitarianism, Karol Wojtyła produced plays in a language and with elements that directly violated the *volkisch* laws; furthermore, The Rhapsodic Theater leveraged its unique circumstances and emphasis on the spoken word over other production elements to directly speak truth to power. The works of Karol Wojtyła and The Rhapsodic Theater reveal how powerful the word is to retain the cultural vivacity of a country: "[Karol Wojtyła] reminded us that history shows, time and again, that 'in a world

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<sup>30</sup> Taborski, 20.

<sup>31</sup> Taborski, 90.

<sup>32</sup> Braun, "Religious Theater in Poland Under Totalitarianism," 299.

<sup>33</sup> Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła / Pope John Paul II*, 7.

without truth, freedom loses its foundation,” and a country without values can lose its very soul.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Centesimus Annus.”