

CATHOLICISM AND LIBERALISM: TWO IDEOLOGIES IN CONFRONTATION

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The author argues that the Catholic Church's social teaching is marked by a critical view of the ideology of Enlightenment Liberalism and of the concept of free market economy when taken as the guiding mechanism of free modern society. Since the great divorce between throne and altar with the French Revolution, the Church's opposition to Liberal ideology, while taking different forms in different periods, has been consistent and persistent.

POPE LEO XIII'S ENCYCLICAL *RERUM NOVARUM* (1891) initiated a series of writings dealing with economic and social issues that formed a corpus referred to as the social teaching of the Catholic Church.¹ My aim here is to present the Church's explicit economic and social teaching and address the principal question on the interpretation of this teaching: Does the Church provide moral instruction—updated according to the issues encountered—designed to enlighten Christians making their way through

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¹ I will consider only the so-called social encyclicals, published on various anniversaries of *Rerum novarum*: *Quadragesimmo anno* (on the foundation of the social order) by Pius XI in 1931, *Mater et magistra* (on the contemporary evolution of social life in the light of Christian principles) by John XXIII in 1961, *Octogesima adveniens* (on the new needs of a changing world) by Paul VI in 1971, *Laborem exercens* (on human labor) in 1981 and *Centesimus annus* in 1991, both by John Paul II. I will also comment on John XXIII's 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in terris* (concerning a peace among all nations founded on truth, justice, charity, and freedom), Vatican II's 1965 pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* (The Church in the Modern World), Paul VI's 1967 encyclical, *Populorum progressio* (on the development of peoples), and John Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* published in 1987 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Populorum progressio*.

I have left out a large collection of documents that echo the content of the social encyclicals: letters published or speeches delivered on the occasion of meetings between the popes and various groups—business persons, workers' and employers' unions—or at conferences organized by Catholic social activists, for example, the *Semaines Sociales* in France and the *Katholikentag* in Germany. The church documents cited can be found on the Vatican's Web site.

this world, or does it promote a specific philosophy of the human person and society that stands in direct opposition to modern thinking?

Plainly, all the commentators on the subject consider the Church's social doctrine as an exhortation to an examination of conscience. This approach is most clearly stated by Jean-Yves Calvez.² More than any other commentator (and indeed more effectively), he interprets the social teaching as a call for discernment,³ even as he acknowledges that the Church is promot-

² Calvez's works, which expound on the whole corpus of the Church's social teaching, are very helpful in that they render often difficult texts much more readable. However, because Calvez chose a pedagogical method for exposing his theological, philosophical, and anthropological analyses, he is rarely critical in his writings. Other important studies considered are: J. B. Duroselle, *Les débuts du catholicisme social (1822–1870)* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1951) and Paul Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe: From the Onset of Industrialization to the First World War* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

³ Calvez defines the Church's social doctrine as a "set of values to be respected at one and the same time." He adds that "the representation of this project varies somewhat according to the needs of each period in history, the possibilities offered, the dramatic situations experienced." Overall, however, the social doctrine, whatever the period, presents a project for a "society centered around the human person," which contributes to "economic growth" and a "developing society" and works toward a "reduction in inequality" and the "right to work" (*L'économie, la société, l'individu: L'enseignement social de l'Église* [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1989] 297). And Jean-Marie Aubert comments: "Given that it is important to grasp, as in advance, the meaning of an evolution, judgments on history can be quite different in their analysis of the past factors that condition the present and the future. As the latter, from now on, always has to be more or less invented, we can now claim a far greater freedom in the possible choices to be made regarding the construction of the future. We can no longer hope to solve problems in fixed terms and with the help of past categories; we must constantly seek out new solutions adapted to a real world in perpetual motion. Thus, in facing these new issues, the Church, with its hierarchical structures, and in its capacity as a visible institution guarding what has been entrusted to man through revelation, senses that it is powerless to deal with these new demands. Does this mean, however, that the Church has no answer for them? Far from it; for, having been illuminated by faith as to the true destiny of humanity and the fundamental reason for its existence, it is also a true expert on humanity; [the Church] can provide humanity with the most effective support" (*Morale sociale pour notre temps* [Paris: Desclée, 1970] 155). On the other hand, François Boëdec and Henri Madelin observe: "The presentation of this long history confirms the fact that the social teaching of the Church has never been bound up in the shackles of tradition. Since *Rerum novarum*, the Church has tried to provide answers to the social issues confronting man. It has not simply repeated the same message in different words; it has, during each period of history, sought to give a Christian response adapted to the challenges of the time. . . . The social teaching provides 'men and women of good-will' with guidelines for their actions" (*L'évangile social: Guide pour une lecture des encycliques sociales* [Paris: Bayard-Centurion, 1999] 41). Alain Barrère (*L'enjeu des changements: Exigences actuelles d'une éthique économique et sociale* [Toulouse: Erès, 1991] 9) characterizes the Church's social doctrine in these same terms.

ing a social project.⁴ In his very first work, written in collaboration with Jacques Perrin, he analyzes the social teaching as a “declaration of the social implications of religious faith.”⁵ In his view, the encyclicals represent an intellectual guide that enables Christians to give meaning to their actions and encourages them to enact certain values. His later works continue and further substantiate this analysis. He thus considers John Paul II to be a true heir to his predecessors.⁶

My study presents the view that the Church’s social doctrine is to be understood as a critique of modern ideology (the Enlightenment) and thus of economic Liberalism, which the Church’s teaching, while defending a political vision of the market, considers to be the mode of regulation for modern society. The Church offers a vision of the human person and society that stands in opposition to the modern world’s view. The Church does not seek to undergird an economic analysis but rather pursues a political goal, seeking to organize the world according to the Church’s own truth. In my view, this intention pervades the whole social teaching of the Church from *Rerum novarum*, the first social encyclical, up to *Centesimus annus*, published a century later, and the last on which I will comment.⁷

⁴ Calvez, *L'économie, la société, l'individu* 297.

⁵ Jean-Yves Calvez and Jacques Perrin, *Église et société économique: L'enseignement social des papes de Léon XIII à Pie XII* (Paris: Aubier, 1959) 11.

⁶ Calvez comments: “On the other hand, it is nice to see that John Paul II has made this distinction between principles and their applications, thus appreciating circumstances and thus better respecting the structure of moral reflection and making room for conscience and for practical judgment as normative—something that regrettably is not found in the Church’s declarations on sexual and family morality” (*Les silences de la doctrine sociale* [Paris: Atelier, 1999] 123).

⁷ Following earlier research reported in Bernard Laurent, *L'enseignement social de l'Église et l'économie de marché* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2007), this article analyzes the Church’s critique of the free market economy within the tradition of intransigent Catholicism. This study, therefore, adds little to the existing literature on Catholic social teaching regarding the free market economy. The current debate between the pro-market fellows of the Acton Institute and its supporters (Rocco Buttiglione in Italy, Jean-Yves Naudet in France, Richard Neuhaus, Michael Novak, Robert Sirico, and George Weigel [see n. 69 below]) and other more eclectic researchers on the regulation of the economy will provide the reader much more material. For instance, Gregory Baum (“An Ethical Critique of Capitalism: Contributions of Modern Catholic Social Teaching,” in *Religion and Economic Justice*, ed. Michael Zwieg [Philadelphia: Temple University, 1991] 78–94) provides a progressive interpretation of Catholic social teaching. More moderate though very critical perspectives can be found in: Charles Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2002); Michel Schooyans, *Pour relever les défis du monde moderne: L'enseignement social de l'Église* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 2004); Jean-Yves Calvez, *L'Église et l'économie: La doctrine sociale de l'Église* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999); and Antonio Barrera, *Modern Catholic*

Under Leo XIII (and his successors) the Church referred to its authority in moral matters to justify its intervention in social and economic issues. To understand the meaning of this affirmation, one must grasp the essence of debates that took place at the end of the 19th century. The Church had not given up its opposition to modern values and the defense of its own way of thinking. The political dimension of this intellectual debate concerned the question of secularity and, as a result, the question of the Church's place in the temporal order. A religious institution though it was, the Church could not forget that it had played an essential political role in world affairs from the end of the Roman Empire up to the 18th century, and that from this time on it was increasingly excluded from temporal affairs. At the end of the 19th century, the Church was still calling into question this very intellectual and political reality that had been established with the Enlightenment.⁸ Thus in 1891, when Leo XIII invoked the Church's moral authority in order to intervene in economic and social matters, he situated the debate on a political and ideological level. Such a position did not reveal any intention to embrace modern values. The pope did not seek to debate values with a view to encouraging the economic sphere to consider social, moral, or anthropological concerns. Leo XIII's aim was to recall the fact that, until the Enlightenment, knowledge as a means of organizing the political world was subject to an overarching system of Catholic values.

In *Rerum novarum*, the founding encyclical of social Catholicism, Leo presented a bleak picture of the social reality of his time. His interest in economic and social issues was in some ways a pretext for rendering the Enlightenment's intellectual system and its associated values responsible for the violence of social interaction. My position is that the social doctrine of the Church is stamped with the mark of ideology.

I will use this term according to the complementary definitions given by

Social Documents and Political Economy (Washington: Georgetown University, 2001). Notice that although Michael Schuck's *That They Be One: The Social Teaching of the Papal Encyclicals, 1740–1989* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1991), although written prior to *Centesimus annus*, is still relevant. For a more recent (and ambiguous) appraisal of the market economy that champions Novak's thought, see Maciej Zieba, *Les papes de Léon XIII à Jean-Paul II et le capitalisme* (Saint-Maurice: Saint-Augustin, 2002).

⁸ See Pierre Manent, *Histoire intellectuelle du libéralisme* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1987) and "Christianisme et démocratie: Quelques remarques sur l'histoire politique de la religion, ou, sur l'histoire religieuse de la politique moderne," in *L'individu, le citoyen, le croyant*, ed. Pierre Colin et al. (Brussels: Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, 1993) 53–73.

Louis Dumont in his work on modern society and by sociologist Émile Poulat in his work on contemporary Catholicism. Dumont contrasts modern society and its individualism with all previous societies; thus he characterizes each civilization by its ideology. He defines ideology as “the comprehensive group of shared ideas and values in a society.”⁹ Poulat, for his part, identifies Catholicism, Liberalism, and Socialism as rival ideologies, inasmuch as each of these three contrasting systems of thought provides an understanding of the human person and society.¹⁰ In this article, the term “ideology” is never to be understood pejoratively; rather, it refers exclusively to a system of thought and its associated values.

The Church does not restrict its analysis of the emancipation of economics in such a way that its analysis can lead only to the development of an independent area of knowledge free of moral assumptions. Rather it gives an ideological and political interpretation of this evolution. In the eyes of the Church, the world underwent an overturning of values during the Enlightenment, an overturning that explains the emergence of a field of knowledge supposedly free from all moral shackles. The modern world is secular, denying any basis in religious principles. The individual is autonomous and sees him- or herself as unconnected to any transcendental reference. In this modern world, theological definition of the epistemological status of sciences no longer has much influence. Knowledge, particularly in the field of economics, is not explicitly subordinated to any specific value system or to any moral constraint. Moreover, the Church gives a political reading of this evolution in philosophical systems. It does not reduce economics to a purely technical system that can be explained by a field of scientific knowledge. It recognizes the reality of the competitive market and accepts it as a mode of regulating modern society. From that point on, modern society, for the Church, becomes an economic society, in which the pursuit of personal interest prevails over solidarity, and material goals take priority over human ones. It sees economics as transformed into a political concept that serves a Liberal ideology. In other words, the Church sees economic Liberalism as a political tool of ideological Liberalism.

The Church’s intervention in social matters is very much in the tradition of intransigent Catholicism, that is, “anti-modern, anti-bourgeois, anti-revolutionary, anti-liberal, anti-socialist.”¹¹ As Poulat rightly comments, the Church views the answer to the social question as “the modern form of

⁹ Louis Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1983) 273.

¹⁰ See Émile Poulat, *Église contre bourgeoisie: Introduction au devenir du catholicisme actuel* (Paris: Casterman, 1977). I gratefully acknowledge my debt to Poulat, on whose work my arguments largely depend.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 219–20.

true Catholicism.”¹² In other words, Catholicism sees itself as a system of thought whose values should consequently inform every area of society. At the end of the 19th century, the Church had become increasingly more involved in the social sphere because of the effects of the industrial revolution and the attendant weight of economic developments. Put another way, the encyclical *Rerum novarum*, which laid the foundations of the Church’s social teaching, should not be considered as a document that presented a new, less reactionary face of Catholicism; rather, it manifested the Church’s hostility toward modernity.

After two centuries of continuous condemnation of modern values, Pope Leo XIII changed the form of this opposition. The form of Catholicism fully hostile to modernity is at the core of my analysis. It bears witness to the Church’s implacable opposition to the intellectual universe of the Enlightenment and the political consequences of this new system of thought that was to gradually exclude the Church from the temporal sphere. From the beginning of the 18th century onward, the various popes, each in his own style, relentlessly condemned the modern conception of the human person and society. Such opposition reached a climax with Pius IX’s *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), which listed what the Church saw as the errors of modern times. Leo XIII, not content simply to denounce an intellectual world, rehabilitated Thomism with his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) to equip the Church with a philosophical system that stood in clear opposition to the Enlightenment. Subsequently, he forged a political doctrine with a series of encyclicals: *Diuturnum illud* (1881) on the divine origin of power, *Immortale Dei* (1885) on the Christian constitution of Nation-states, and *Libertas praestantissimum* (1888) on the Christian conception of human freedom. Finally, he provided the Church with a social doctrine, thus demonstrating that the vocation of Catholicism was to influence all areas of society.

This condemnation of ideological Liberalism seems to be a permanent feature of the Church’s social teaching, even though the form of the discourse evolves. It is true that the positions of the Church have been historically determined; that is, it has adapted its stance according to the evolution of ideas and situations. But this frequent updating by no means indicates that the Church has reconciled itself to the modern world; rather, its goal has been to demonstrate the relevance of a discourse based on universal and, indeed, timeless principles. The Church has never renounced its struggle to defend a system of thought that influences social realities and their representation. Therefore we consider the term “doctrine” to be far

¹² Émile Poulat, *Catholicisme, démocratie, socialisme* (Paris: Casterman, 1977) 112.

more adequate in qualifying the Church's social teaching than the word "teaching" itself, a word much used after Vatican II (1962–1965) by various commentators for whom the Church had moved closer to modern society.

I am convinced that the magisterium's teaching on social topics reflects a development of intransigent Catholicism. The Church has based itself on a rather loose presentation of the world's economic and social problems: the situation of the working classes in the 19th century (Leo XIII), the crisis that followed the stock market crash of 1929 (Pius XI), the problems of underdevelopment (John XXIII and Paul VI), and, more recently, unemployment and the collapse of Communism (John Paul II). The Church has employed this loose presentation to carry out a much more stinging attack on economic Liberalism, that is, the working of the competitive market and, beyond that, the ideology of the modern world. Indeed, it has sought to stigmatize a world that no longer takes its inspiration from divine law or from natural law. Modernity's rejection of such an anthropological foundation makes it impossible, in the eyes of the Church, to organize society for the benefit of humanity. The modern individual can thus be defined only in terms of his or her material interest, and in such a way that the economic dimension of society holds sway over all others. Over a period of 100 years, the Church maintained the same vigor in denouncing a world where *having* was more important than *being*, and where capital prevailed over work.

The Church's social doctrine should not be read as a declaration of major moral principles designed to help Christians plot the best possible course through modern society, which Vatican II is supposed to have finally accepted, but rather as a demand on the part of various popes that the Church exert a visible, albeit indirect, influence on the temporal world. During the whole period under study, the Church constantly referred to its fundamental truth, in opposition to what it considered to be modern relativism, in which all private choices had equal status. Not only did the Church never give up working toward the moral improvement of humanity, but it also constantly sought to reestablish a realm of Christian intellectual thought, employing more or less vigor according to its place in society and the size of its audience.

I begin my analysis by presenting the consequences for the Catholic Church of the Enlightenment's break with the past. I have adopted a chronological approach in as much as, on the one hand, I insist on the permanent nature of the Church's doctrine in its substance; on the other hand, I argue that the form of intransigence evolves over time according to the Church's place in society and the size of its audience. I identify three main expressions of this intransigent position corresponding to three precise time-periods. During the first period, when the Church still thought that the Liberal system could be reversed, the Church adopted a particu-

larly aggressive stance first with Leo XIII in 1891, then with Pius XI in 1931, who promoted a Christian alternative to the modern conception of the human person and society. With the success of the Liberal economic system in the developed countries after World War II and the assertion of modern ideas, the Church's influence waned. John XXIII sought to give new impetus to the Church by launching the Second Vatican Council. Nevertheless, the social discourse it developed, however critical the position remained, was not particularly powerful. Not until the economic slump in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis and the adoption, after 1980, of solutions explicitly based on Liberal ideology did the Church, spurred on by John Paul II, once again adopt a more aggressive tone.

These three sections of my analysis, which present the content of the Church's social doctrine, are structured along the same lines. I begin with a discussion of the form of the Church's opposition to ideological Liberalism and, by extension, to the workings of the competitive market. I then present the Church's thinking on the principal elements of the functioning of society that underpin the Church's opposition to Liberal thought: its conception of society, the role of the State, and private property.

THE CHURCH'S REACTION TO THE ENLIGHTENMENT

What legitimacy does the Church have to influence matters of this world? Providing a definition of "Christianity" helps to answer this difficult question. I adopt here the approach of Jean Brun, for whom Christianity is an overarching system of meaning, that is, a system making claims about man's being.¹³ For example, Christianity claims that humanity was created in God's image. Humanity must therefore abide by the Creator's plan for the created person, namely to do good and thus to return to God. In the earthly pilgrimage toward perfect fellowship and union with God, Christians must ask the question how this pilgrimage should lead them to influence the economic, political, and social structures of their world. In other words, does Catholicism imply a principle of political organization? To attempt an answer is to attempt to define the zones of influence of the spiritual and temporal spheres. For many, the spiritual sphere prevails to such a degree that the Church has no role in organizing political and social life. I defend a less categorical position here, relying on the writings of Pierre Manent.¹⁴ He holds that the Church gives a contradictory definition of itself. The kingdom that it proclaims is not of this world, but its teaching is very much directed at the world. The Church thus has authority over human affairs, not only a "right of control," but much

¹³ Jean Brun, *L'Europe philosophe* (Paris: Stock, 1988).

¹⁴ See n. 8 above.

more a “duty of control” when the salvation it promises is imperilled.¹⁵ As human actions relate to issues of good and evil, the Church believes that it has both a right and a duty to speak out. It is not the place of the social order to encourage or even authorize acts that could compromise salvation. Manent rightly emphasized the fact that, as the acts of those who govern us are of the most serious consequence, the Church finds itself committed to carefully considering their decisions. He concludes that “the Church’s claim to supreme power,” whether direct or indirect, and regardless of the fact that it is not in its vocation to organize the political and social sphere, is “logical and not simply linked to specific circumstances in time.”¹⁶

The history of Europe bears witness to the difficulty of delineating these two spheres. In order to review the evolving relations between the Church and the political powers, I will continue to refer to Manent, who begins with the fall of the Holy Roman Empire of the West. He reflects on the political forms that were available to humanity after this fall. First was the Empire, which he defines by its universal characteristic as a unifier of humanity¹⁷ and not as a form of “conquering excess.” Then came the city-state, which he sees as “a public space where men and citizens deliberate and make decisions regarding their common concerns and affairs.”¹⁸ This notion of “the control by humanity associated over the conditions of its existence” Manent sees as a political idea taken from “natural law.”¹⁹ To this list of organizational models he adds the Church, even though its vocation is not to organize the political sphere. He makes it clear, however, that its “existence” as well as its “vocation” was to pose a problem for Europeans. Manent analyzes the political development of Europe as the history of responses to the problems posed by the Church²⁰ and the new set of questions raised by each response. Along with certain philosophers, I see this antagonistic relationship between the Church and the political powers, which is central to the emergence of modern society, as a theologico-political issue.

An important phase in this theologico-political conflict took place during the 18th century. We need to understand the stakes of the “war” (as Manent puts it²¹) waged on Christianity by the Enlightenment, and of the

¹⁵ Manent, *Histoire intellectuelle du libéralisme* 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 21.

¹⁷ “The notion of empire is linked to that of the unity of humanity and the universality of human nature, which desires to be acknowledged and considered by a single authority. It is a natural political concept” (*ibid.* 18).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.* 13.

Church's equally violent and hostile reaction to the new ideas of the Enlightenment. Manent does not see in this confrontation the involvement simply of "one immense misunderstanding" readily explainable by historical factors, but rather of the whole essence of modernity, that is, of Liberalism.²² In the process of contesting political power over religion, Catholicism itself was called into question. It is true that the Enlightenment was not directed against Catholicism as such, nor as a belief system, but was merely against the Church's political power.²³ To this end, it seemed perfectly legitimate to contest the political power of that belief system in the name of freedom, while acknowledging the eminent value of the system. But the Church could not accept the classification of faith as an opinion of purely relative value. The Church considered itself the bearer of truth, and this gave it the authority to organize relations between the temporal and spiritual spheres. Conflict between these two ideologies was thus inevitable.

The philosophical system of the Enlightenment marked a paradigm shift that heralded the birth of man.²⁴ The traditional conception of man's nature gave way to the notion of an individual possessing rights. This new definition of humanity went hand in hand with a different vision of political authority. Humanity no longer received the law from the outside (heteronomy) but had to create the law it wished to abide by (autonomy). Modern society²⁵ was self-established. The organization of society had to subordinate itself to individual rights. Thus the emancipation of economics from moral and political constraints can be studied as a response to the question of the socialization of individuals and the regulation of their activities in modern society. I propose that the market should be understood as a "political concept"²⁶ and not simply as a tool for allocating scarce resources.

²² See Manent's introduction to his *Histoire intellectuelle du libéralisme*. The following paragraph owes much to his work.

²³ It is a strong and concise affirmation. As Pierre Manent puts it, the political autonomy of the Enlightenment succeeded to a political body dominated by the Church at the end of the eleventh century (during the Gregorian reform): "*l'ecclēsia christiana* is considered as the real *respublica*" ("Christianisme et démocratie," in *L'individu, le citoyen, le croyant* 65). As a consequence, religious beliefs are tolerated only in private life and are seen as having no bearing on the public arena.

²⁴ For example, see Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

²⁵ "Modern" is often used in this article in Louis Dumont's sense. For him individualism is the main characteristic of modern society: society's rights are subordinate to the individual's rights; in traditional societies, it is the other way round. See Louis Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme* and *Homo-Aequalis: Genèse et épanouissement de l'idéologie économique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

²⁶ Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le libéralisme économique: Histoire de l'idée de marché*

The advent of the modern individual, as a being independent of the social entity in which he or she had formerly been subordinated, came with a transformation in values. Society could no longer be organized with a view to serving a specific human purpose without flouting the notion of freedom. The cohesion of the community had to be conceived along the lines of unanimity. This was possible only if the law showed concern for human rights as they existed in a presocial state. But then politics was robbed of any intentionality. Each individual alone was competent to define his or her interest. Society had become utilitarian. From that point on, a mode of socialization free of any specific perspective had to be imagined. The competitive market, defended by economists as a self-regulating mechanism, represented an answer to this need. The political system had transformed itself into an economic system. Society had become materialist. The traditional moral system had fallen by the wayside.

To this transformation, which unfolded with clear disadvantage to the Church's traditional role, the popes reacted. Until the Enlightenment, political life had been organized according to the Church's overarching system of thought. The economy had its place among a whole range of social phenomena that were subject to moral rules defined by the Church. The Church's reaction attained a level of violence commensurate with the challenge to both its intellectual universe and its influence over temporal affairs. Two systems of thought were to enter into an uncompromising confrontation.

PRE-VATICAN II ENCYCLICALS: THE WILL TO FIGHT BACK

Rehabilitation of Thomism: A Policy of Intransigence

In 1878, in an atmosphere of obdurate hostility to the modern world, Leo XIII succeeded Pius IX. Leo represented an important phase in the Church's policy of intransigence by modifying the form of its opposition, but without abdicating its essential position to modernity, and this despite a reputation for open-mindedness. For many authors,²⁷ Leo's papacy marked a change in direction. Of course, the Church's teaching remained doctrinaire and reactionary, opposed to modern ideas, but Leo initiated a more conciliatory style, two examples of which are his letter to French Catholics on *Ralliement* (his call to support republicanism, despite

(Paris: Seuil-Point, 1989), originally developed these ideas. See especially his introduction "Penser le libéralisme" (i-x).

²⁷ Georges Jarlot, *Doctrine pontificale et histoire: L'enseignement social de Léon XIII, Pie X, et Benoît XV vu dans son ambiance historique* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1964) 16.

some of its anti-Catholic legislation) and a renewed commitment to the Thomistic theory of power that acknowledges the secular origin of sovereignty. On the centennial of the French Revolution, French Catholics, following in the tradition of the intransigent branch of Catholicism, sought to express their hostility to modern democracy with a number of anticentennial initiatives. Leo reacted by addressing a letter to the French bishops, encouraging the Church in France to recognize the authority of the modern State.²⁸ My analysis draws on Poulat's thought, particularly his idea that the *Ralliement* in no way reflected a recognition of modern ideology: "it did not imply any adherence to the principles of the modern political order—and it became acceptable to all French Catholics by virtue of a whole range of distinctions that were made between the constitution and the law, the regime and ideology, the power of the State and the form of government. A theological conception and a political strategy together gave rise to a policy of indifference to the constitution that in no way implied ideological neutrality."²⁹

Leo XIII presented the Church's aggressive face, but he changed strategy. Rather than express opposition through constant invective, he proposed a daring organic reform of society. By first rehabilitating Thomistic doctrine he provided the Church with a solid intellectual base³⁰ and thus hoped to win back the position the Church previously enjoyed in society. *Rerum novarum* completed his offensive by developing both a political and economic doctrine and establishing the policy of intransigence in the social sphere.³¹

Leo understood that the battle had to be fought on the political level.³² Defenders of modernity not only questioned the intellectual base of the Church but also its influence over temporal matters. He thus realized the need to equip the Church with a theory of power that would renew its

²⁸ Leo XIII, *Au milieu des sollicitudes*, February, 16 1892. See Alexander Sedgwick, *The Ralliement in French Politics, 1890–1898* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1965).

²⁹ Poulat, *Église contre bourgeoisie* 164.

³⁰ The analyses that follow depend on Poulat, "L'Église romaine, le savoir et le pouvoir: Une philosophie à la mesure d'une politique," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 37 (1974) 5–21, which puts Thibault's work into perspective.

³¹ For an exposition of the encyclical and the texts themselves see Arthur F. Utz, *La doctrine sociale de l'Église à travers les siècles*, 4 vols. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1970).

³² This is my extension of Manent's thought. Since Pius IX adopted a defensive position in his Syllabus (see, e.g., the last condemned proposition: "The Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization"), the pontiff must not reconcile himself with modernity. Within a new intellectual framework, Leo XIII tried to defend a political world that relates itself to Catholic ethics. Since then, the ideological battle moved to a political level.

opposition to modernity. It was not the unexpected emergence of the modern secular State so much as the independence of political powers that needed to be faced up to. Thomistic doctrine offered a model that recognized humanity's autonomous right to manage its own affairs, provided that the State respect the moral norm that the Church defined and that framed political actions. Aquinas, it is true, distinguished between the spiritual and the temporal spheres, but he always asserted the primacy of the former over the latter. The rehabilitation of his philosophy implied no concessions to modern ideas. Indeed, the Thomistic model was helpful in expressing the Church's opposition to modern political theory. The Church could thus lay claim to its right to influence political power without exercising any direct responsibility.³³ Poulat correctly emphasizes that the use of Thomism was not just a metaphysical or theological issue. Leo XIII used it as an intellectual tool in the service of a political goal,³⁴ as a "philosophy that had all the trappings of a political strategy."³⁵ The Church saw itself as an "alternative society"³⁶ whose vocation was to restore a Christian social order. The return to Thomistic philosophy did not reflect a desire to reinstate the *Ancien Régime* but to rediscover the Christian Middle-Ages. With Pius IX and his Syllabus, the Church had conclusively and reflexively condemned modernity. Under Leo XIII, it went on the attack; Thomistic philosophy was both the theoretical foundation of a Christian political

³³ Poulat writes: "Thus the Church had nothing to lose and everything to gain in showing such openness: a secularized State would itself withdraw any claims it might have to intervene in affairs of time immemorial without totally escaping the scope of ecclesiastic influence. Modern society provided the opportunity, and Thomistic philosophy the possibility, of enjoying a double advantage: without renouncing its intransigent attitude and while continuing to assert all its demands, the Holy See was able to enter the playing field of the secular powers and even receive a warm welcome. A shrewd pope could hardly fail to support this 'grand design' with all his energy. At a time when faith was perceived as an opposing force and a remedy for the turbulent state of modern times, the highest authorities of the Church could find no other conceptual approach that could offer such certainty, such coherence, and such perspectives as Thomism" ("L'Église romaine, le savoir et le pouvoir" 18).

³⁴ "Contrary to what many seminary teachers wished to believe, Thomism was not exclusively, nor even principally, a Scholastic system designed to combat the modern philosophy of knowledge inherited from Descartes and Kant: it was also a *De regimine principum*, a political theology combining and structuring, within the core of human society, the two orders of divine grace and human nature, the spiritual and the temporal, the Church and the State: an ancient issue dating from the time of Pope Gelasius at the end of the 5th century" (Émile Poulat, "Le libéralisme économique entre deux encycliques: Cent ans de doctrine sociale catholique," *Foi et développement* 208 (1992) 3).

³⁵ *Ibid.* 19.

³⁶ The term comes from Poulat, *ibid.* 9.

strategy and the guiding principle of a clerical political strategy to be launched at the first opportunity.³⁷

This return to Thomism could not be reduced, therefore, either to a declaration of liberal principles that would imply recognition of the modern State, or to a purely reactionary attitude that would convey an anti-modern philosophy. It was to be understood as the will to rehabilitate a doctrine that at one and the same time acknowledged the democratic principle and defended Christian civilization. The pope sought, on the one hand, to enter into a dialogue with the modern world and, on the other, to assert the primacy of spiritual values and thus defend the legitimacy of the Church's power, however indirect. By placing the Church in a more subordinate position and restricting faith to a purely private realm there was no question of giving way to modernity. The return to Thomistic philosophy was clearly meant to serve a renewed policy of intransigence.³⁸

***Rerum novarum*: Developing a Policy of Intransigence**

The first social encyclical cannot be understood outside the ideological context described above. There is not, on the one side, the intransigent position of the Church and its legacy of a reactionary philosophy and, on the other side, a progressive attitude born out of Leo XIII's growing sensitivity to the social problems that accompanied 19th-century industrialization. *Rerum novarum* cannot be considered as distinct from the other Leonine encyclicals, as if it were a document that expressed a new and separate vision of Catholicism. It was a component of the general reaction to modernity. As Poulat rightly remarks, the Church was to consider the social question as the modern form of true Catholicism.³⁹ For Poulat, the roots and the religious horizon of social Catholicism must not be neglected: "It is impossible, however, to forget the fact that this form of Catholicism aimed to be and presented itself as the full solution to the catastrophic irreligious nature of modern times."⁴⁰ In the context of this project for the organic reform of society, Leo XIII referred to all of society's dimensions, including the economic and social spheres, in light of their unprecedented transformations. Poulat rightly claims that, for the Church, the "social question" was simply one aspect of "social atheism," itself a consequence

³⁷ See Poulat, "Le libéralisme économique entre deux encycliques" 19.

³⁸ "This Thomism 'for our time' appears to be the ultimate dream of Christian reason, which remembers having been the fundamental norm for all reason, when the reason of the Church was put above the reason of the State and was asserted in spite of scientific reason" (ibid. 21).

³⁹ See Poulat, *Catholicisme, démocratie, socialisme* 112.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 137–38.

of this “revolutionary Satanism.”⁴¹ I will therefore use his vocabulary to characterize Leonine Catholicism thus:

- Roman: the papacy was its head and its heart. Leo XIII was seeking to pursue the centralizing trend initiated at the beginning of the 19th century;
- intransigent: in other words, “anti-modern, anti-bourgeois, anti-revolutionary, anti-liberal, anti-socialist”;⁴²
- total: it applied to all fields of society;
- social: the vocation of its teaching was to maintain an influence over temporal matters.

It is in the light of these characteristics that *Rerum novarum* should be interpreted. It is an encyclical that was paradoxically marked by both continuity and novelty.⁴³ It adhered to the intransigent tradition of the Leonine encyclicals in laying the blame for the economic and social disorders of the time on the doorstep of Enlightenment philosophy. It distinguished itself, however, by its assessment of the future importance of the economy as a “structuring feature”⁴⁴ of the modern world. It realized that the fight against modernity forced the Church to occupy the social ground.⁴⁵ so much so that the popes would celebrate *Rerum novarum* at regular intervals.

The same intransigent position, therefore, perdures from Leo XIII’s *Rerum novarum* (1891) to Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo anno* (1931). These encyclicals show that the Church did not believe in the permanence of the new political order and was working toward its reversal. Such actions, however, put the Church in conflict with the political sphere. In developing a social doctrine, the Church resisted its eviction from the temporal sphere

⁴¹ Ibid. 137.

⁴² Poulat, *Église contre bourgeoisie* 220.

⁴³ “Social Catholicism is thus both an end and a beginning. It would be an illusion and an error to believe that it had come about *ex nihilo*: long before it could define itself as ‘social,’ in the more recent sense of the term, Catholicism had gone through a wide variety of successive states of intransigence. Another error, and another illusion, would consist in imagining that, in adopting this social orientation (which would nevertheless come in just as many different shapes and sizes), [Catholicism] broke quickly and cleanly with its original intransigence” (Poulat, *Catholicisme, démocratie, socialisme* 117).

⁴⁴ The expression belongs to Dumont. See his *Essais sur l’individualisme*.

⁴⁵ “The development of industrial capitalism gave the economic and the social spheres an autonomous space that Christianity had to occupy if it wished to remain total and not restrict itself to purely private matters” (Poulat, *Catholicisme, démocratie, socialisme* 124).

and attempted to recover its former authority. Within the limits specified by the modern system of the separation of the spiritual and temporal spheres, it was striving, by virtue of Leonine social discourse, to have as great an impact as possible on the government of humanity.⁴⁶

As an economist, I am particularly interested in the permanent link that the Church established, first in *Rerum novarum*, then in *Quadragesimo anno*—and, in fact, in all subsequent social encyclicals—between ideological and economic Liberalism. The Church saw the former as the value system of the Enlightenment with the emergence of the autonomous individual as that ideology's most salient feature; it saw the latter as promoting the play of competitive market forces that regulate modern society. Whereas the early economists celebrated the emancipation of economics, considering that it could guarantee humanity's modern rights, the Church condemned the now-privileged place of economics that deprived society of any meaningful purpose. The popes ceaselessly denounced the notion of the natural harmony of individual interest as promoted by Liberal thinkers in order to give legitimacy to the competitive market economy in its political function. The Church charged that Liberal rhetoric reduced "justice" to the successful functioning of the market, given that, in order to organize commercial exchange, there was no longer any need to take into consideration individuals' characteristics, nor any of their motivations.⁴⁷ Far from transforming the competitive play of individual selfishness into social harmony, however, market competition would, in the Church's opinion, favor the domination of the poorest by the richest. In short, the Church was condemning a society that placed capital above work.

⁴⁶ See Manent, "Christianisme et démocratie" 53–73.

⁴⁷ "Just as the unity of human society cannot be founded on an opposition of classes, so also the right ordering of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces. For from this source, as from a poisoned spring, have originated and spread all the errors of individualist economic teaching. Destroying through forgetfulness or ignorance the social and moral character of economic life, it held that economic life must be considered and treated as altogether free from and independent of public authority, because in the market, i.e., in the free struggle of competitors, it would have a principle of self direction which governs it much more perfectly than would the intervention of any created intellect. But free competition, while justified and certainly useful provided it is kept within certain limits, clearly cannot direct economic life—a truth which the outcome of the application in practice of the tenets of this evil individualistic spirit has more than sufficiently demonstrated. Therefore, it is most necessary that economic life be again subjected to and governed by a true and effective directing principle" (*Quadragesimo anno* no. 88). "For since the seeds of a new form of economy were bursting forth just when the principles of rationalism had been implanted and rooted in many minds, there quickly developed a body of economic teaching far removed from the true moral law, and, as a result, completely free rein was given to human passions" (*ibid.* no. 133).

The representations of the social order and the conception of the role of the State put forward by the pre-Vatican II popes were in keeping with the intransigent tradition that was hostile to modernity. Both *Rerum novarum* and *Quadragesimo anno* promoted a highly traditional vision of social organization. Instead of the individualism of the modern world, the popes defended a holistic vision of the social order by promoting corporations (guilds). If Pius XI devoted some of his most well-known expositions to the latter, Leo XIII had already built up his whole project for society around them.⁴⁸ On this matter I disagree with Mary Hobgood,⁴⁹ for whom the holistic approach defended by the pre-Vatican II popes reveals common features between the social doctrine and certain aspects of capitalism. Nor do I favor the approach of Chantal Millon-Delsol,⁵⁰ who, conversely, refuses to see any organic vision of society in the Church's social doctrine. If the corporations represent a model specific to the Church, Millon-Delsol interprets their rehabilitation as a desire to accommodate modern society.

Within this holistic framework, both Pius XI and Leo XIII condemned, on the one hand, the Liberal vision of a State that had extricated itself from the economic and social spheres and, on the other hand, the Socialist vision of an all-powerful State. The Church's social doctrine includes the principle of subsidiarity operative in the role assigned to each institution or each actor. In this respect, I call into question the liberal interpretations of subsidiarity developed in their most complete form by Millon-Delsol,⁵¹ who establishes a number of common attitudes between the Church's thinking on the place of the individual vis-à-vis the State and Liberal ide-

⁴⁸ Thus Leo XIII: "In any case we clearly see, and on this there is general agreement, 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 corporations were abolished in the last century, and no other protective organization took their place" (*Rerum novarum* no. 3). "If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accept harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford him no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice. In these and similar questions, however—such as, for example, the hours of labor in different trades, the sanitary precautions to be observed in factories and workshops, etc.—in order to supersede undue interference on the part of the State, especially as circumstances, times, and localities differ so widely, it is advisable that recourse be had to societies or boards such as We shall mention presently, or to some other mode of safeguarding the interests of the wage-earners; the State being appealed to, should circumstances require, for its sanction and protection" (*ibid.* no. 45).

⁴⁹ See Mary Hobgood, *Catholic Social Teaching and Economic Theory, Paradigms in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1991).

⁵⁰ See Chantal Millon-Delsol, *L'Etat subsidiaire: Ingérence et noningérence del'Etat: Le principe de subsidiarité aux fondements de l'histoire européenne* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

ology. Of course, she does acknowledge the hostility of the Church's social teaching to radical Liberalism, but she interprets subsidiarity as a means of distancing the individual from the State, which, in her eyes, represents an attitude shared with the Liberal approach. This argument, however, is not in keeping with the Catholic representation of political authority. In each of the social encyclicals, the popes consistently defended a traditional vision of power as the mainstay of society.⁵² The State was the foremost and supreme authority. Its duty was to contribute to the common good, that is, to ensure that the rules of justice were respected in such a way that each member of the community became an element in the social whole. Individual initiative is always subject to collective rules. It is thus that, first of all, the Church favors a descending interpretation of subsidiarity, that is, from the State to the individual. Having thus acknowledged the State's authority, the Church then encourages the initiative of individuals and, even more so, of intermediary bodies. Then, secondarily, it favors an ascending interpretation of the concept. In my interpretation, the Church's recourse to subsidiarity can be read as an attempt to develop a new vision of social structures in the light of its teaching.

Having established the role of the State in promoting justice, I now consider the practical modes of its application. In the Church's social doctrine we find no treatises on justice such as those developed by Scholastic theologians. It is true that the popes employ the traditional terms of commutative and distributive justice, but their use is far too allusive to identify any real content, not even that of their distant predecessors. It suffices to note that the vocabulary originates in Thomistic philosophy. On the other hand, what has to be emphasized is the repeated affirmation, via the notion of justice, of the subordination of the political to the moral sphere. The Church thus asserted its legitimacy to participate in the elaboration of a normative framework for moral order, however great the risk of establishing a theocracy.

In the absence of a theoretical exposition, the Church provided practical recommendations. The popes defended the notion of a fair or moral wage, as opposed to that of a competitive market wage, and did so as a consequence of their organic vision of society, which was in no way to be understood as promoting an egalitarian society. A fair wage, in their eyes, represented a means of recreating a certain harmony between different

⁵² Dumont contrasts the representation of authority in traditional societies, where power and hierarchy are considered to be the constituent elements of all societies, with the modern perception that sees power as a means to promote individual rights. In modern societies, power is not seen as a constituent part of society, as it is in premodern societies, where the hierarchical structure of society is a "condition of their existence as a whole" (Dumont, *Essais sur l'individualisme* 87).

classes, a harmony that had been badly battered by the violence of capitalism.⁵³ Leo XIII clearly established the parameters of the problem inherent in the freedom of the individual in modern society. He acknowledged each individual's right to self-determination concerning the different choices available, including that of accepting a miserly wage in payment for mediocre achievement. But he established the requirement of social integration for all as a prerequisite to any negotiation. Any wage should allow those whose only resource was their own work to have enough for survival.

The Church's social doctrine clearly pronounced itself against the free determination of a contractual wage in as much as it might result from negotiation involving a person in need and thus deprived of the freedom to make a considered judgement. In contrast to free wage determination in the competitive market, Leo XIII proposed wage negotiations between the representative instances of the different social partners. He was thus referring to the unions, both employers' and workers' unions. If, however, fair treatment could not be ensured in this way, the encyclical acknowledged the legitimacy of State intervention and the ultimate responsibility of the State, as the constitutive authority within society, to maintain the common good by a redistribution policy.⁵⁴

⁵³ "Public institutions and the laws set aside the ancient religion. Hence, by degrees it has come to pass that working men have been surrendered, isolated and helpless, to the hardheartedness of employers and the greed of unchecked competition. The mischief has been increased by rapacious usury, which, although more than once condemned by the Church, is nevertheless, under a different guise, but with like injustice, still practiced by covetous and grasping men. To this must be added that the hiring of labor and the conduct of trade are concentrated in the hands of comparatively few; so that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the laboring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself" (*Rerum novarum* no. 3). "For toward the close of the nineteenth century, the new kind of economic life that had arisen and the new developments of industry had gone to the point in most countries that human society was clearly becoming divided more and more into two classes. One class, very small in number, was enjoying almost all the advantages which modern inventions so abundantly provided; the other, embracing the huge multitude of working people, oppressed by wretched poverty, was vainly seeking escape from the straits wherein it stood" (*Quadragesimo anno* no. 3).

⁵⁴ "Now, were we to consider labor merely in so far as it is personal, doubtless it would be within the workman's right to accept any rate of wages whatsoever; for in the same way as he is free to work or not, so is he free to accept a small wage or even none at all. But our conclusion must be very different if, together with the personal element in a man's work, we consider the fact that work is also necessary for him to live: these two aspects of his work are separable in thought, but not in reality. The preservation of life is the bounden duty of one and all, and to be wanting therein is a crime. It necessarily follows that each one has a natural right to procure what is required in order to live, and the poor can procure that in no

The same moral approach is evident in *Quadragesimo anno*, even if Pius XI shows greater understanding for the constraints companies have to work under.⁵⁵ With Leo XIII, he espoused a living wage, while placing greater emphasis on the family. The theoretical basis of his position, however, was fragile. He remained equidistant between the (Marxist) supporters of high wages and the (Liberal) advocates of the most orthodox flexibility, however much this position might imply severe wage deflation. Thus he defended a middle way combining both a moral approach that should enable wage-earners to acquire all the components of an honest living, and a certain economic realism—that advocated care lest companies' survival be jeopardized by excessively high wages—not justifiable by rigorous analytical reasoning. Beyond these circumlocutions, which hid a certain opportunistic attempt to please the majority, Pius XI's fundamental position was patently antiliberal, so much so that, on the issue of wages, he remained true to Leo's position. There was no question of allowing wages to be determined by the play of competitive market forces.

I now present the Church's defense of a traditional order by examining its discourse on private property. The Church included in its traditional

other way than by what they can earn through their work" (*Rerum novarum* no. 44); therefore, "let the working man and the employer make free agreements, and in particular let them agree freely as to the wages; nevertheless, there underlies a dictate of natural justice more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man and man, namely, that wages ought not to be insufficient to support a frugal and well-behaved wage-earner . . ." (ibid. no. 45; see n. 48 above for the completion of this quotation).

⁵⁵ "Lastly, the amount of the pay must be adjusted to the public economic good. We have shown above how much it helps the common good for workers and other employees, by setting aside some part of their income which remains after necessary expenditures, to attain gradually to the possession of a moderate amount of wealth. But another point, scarcely less important, and especially vital in our times, must not be overlooked: namely, that the opportunity to work be provided to those who are able and willing to work. This opportunity depends largely on the wage and salary rate, which can help as long as it is kept within proper limits, but which on the other hand can be an obstacle if it exceeds these limits. Everyone knows that an excessive lowering of wages, or their increase beyond due measure, causes unemployment. This evil, indeed, especially as we see it prolonged and injuring so many during the years of Our Pontificate, has plunged workers into misery and temptations, ruined the prosperity of nations, and put in jeopardy the public order, peace, and tranquillity of the whole world. Hence it is contrary to social justice when, for the sake of personal gain and without regard for the common good, wages and salaries are excessively lowered or raised; and this same social justice demands that wages and salaries be so managed, through agreement of plans and wills, in so far as can be done, as to offer to the greatest possible number the opportunity of getting work and obtaining suitable means of livelihood" (*Quadragesimo anno* no. 74).

theory of property considered as a “social institution”⁵⁶ the idea that the use of property should be collective or social. Nevertheless, I would insist on the idea that Leo XIII developed a line of argument that, on this point, revealed features in common with Liberal ideology, as he defended both the idea of property in its collective applications and private property as a natural right of the individual. I ascribe the peculiar nature of this thinking, which otherwise follows orthodox intransigence, to the fear of Socialism, which the Church identified as its most formidable ideological rival. Pius XI, for his part, emphasized the social dimension of private property, even while defending it against Socialist theory.

I conclude this section with a general characterization of the first series of social encyclicals. Leo XIII’s encyclicals expressed the Church’s will to fight against modernity. The place of the economy in modern society had been honestly examined. Both *Rerum novarum* and *Quadragesimo anno* interpreted the economy as the dimension that structured society, and the competitive market as the mode of coordinating human activity. The Church’s condemnation of Liberalism culminated in Pius IX’s Syllabus. The Church’s social doctrine rejected economic Liberalism, which it considered a tool for managing modern society. The Church remained convinced, however, that the social order emerging from the Enlightenment would not last. Having sought to win back positions in the economic field, the Church defended the virtues of a Christian Catholic science, even though its content was rather fragile. Above all, the Church’s priority was to discredit Liberal rhetoric concerning the natural harmony of individual interest by presenting a dark picture of capitalism’s reality. Consequently, all initiatives designed to subordinate the economy to human purpose were to be encouraged. Thus the Church sought to promote its system of values.

ENCYCLICALS OF THE VATICAN II ERA: TONING DOWN THE POLICY OF INTRANSIGENCE

The Church’s economic discourse evolved after World War II, corresponding to a development in the theologico-political debate. But if the form of the discourse changed—and that rather spectacularly—its fundamental content remained very much in the tradition of intransigence. I agree with Poulat, who, while commenting on the Catholicism of Vatican

⁵⁶ Dumont contrasts the traditional approach to private property, seen as a social institution—that is, as something purely relative, the treatment of which is specific to each political community—with its modern representation, that is, as an attribute of the individual. In modern society, private property enjoys the status of an inviolable right that guarantees the rights of the persons. See Dumont, *Essais sur l’individualisme* 85–86.

I, remarks that 100 years later the intransigent spirit had not disappeared, even if it had evolved to the point of becoming almost unrecognizable.⁵⁷ He adds that, with Vatican II, it was rather the Church's relation to the State that had changed than man's relation to truth.⁵⁸ The Church was facing up to a modern world revelling in the successes of the developed nations during the postwar period of unparalleled economic growth.⁵⁹ In these countries, moral standards and lifestyles were becoming freer, and religious practice was declining considerably. As it was becoming more difficult for the Church to lay the daily misery experienced by humanity on the doorstep of Enlightenment values, Vatican II changed direction regarding the form of the Church's opposition. Manent portrays the Church's relationship with political powers as less abrasive, in as much as the Church toned down its claim to influence over the temporal sphere. It still vigorously condemned Liberal ideology, but its criticism became less political: it was "playing the role of the 'noble soul,' working for the collective good, and passing itself off as the 'bearer of ideals and values.'"⁶⁰ As Manent states, while the values that the Church unremittingly defended could be declared publicly, they held sway over no one. The council's social doctrine acknowledged the difficulty of asserting a purpose that was both spiritual and political, and referred to a clear and explicit intellectual foundation for its purpose, just as it had with Thomism during the preceding phase.

And yet, in substance, the Church never relinquished its attacks on the modern world. Its insistence that the debate focus on the anthropological level bore witness to this determination. The Church denounced the modern attitude that rejected the role of natural or divine law in defining humanity and sociopolitical organization.⁶¹ In its eyes, this rejection re-

⁵⁷ Poulat, *Catholicisme, démocratie, socialisme* 58.

⁵⁸ Émile Poulat, *Liberté, laïcité: La guerre des deux France et le principe de la modernité* (Paris: Cerf, 1987) 86.

⁵⁹ This phrase translates a set expression in French, that of "Les Trentes Glorieuses." Originally the title of an essay published in 1979 by economist Jean Fourastié, it is used to refer to the period of unrivalled consumer prosperity that France experienced between 1945 and 1973. See Patrick White, *Harrap's Unabridged Dictionary*, 2 vols. (London: 2001) 2:567.

⁶⁰ Pierre Manent, "Christianisme et démocratie" 71.

⁶¹ "Now the order which prevails in human society is wholly incorporeal in nature. Its foundation is truth, and it must be brought into effect by justice. It needs to be animated and perfected by men's love for one another, and, while preserving freedom intact, it must make for an equilibrium in society which is increasingly more human in character" (*Pacem in terris* no. 47).

"Governmental authority, therefore, is a postulate of the moral order and derives from God. Consequently, laws and decrees passed in contravention of the moral order, and hence of the divine will, can have no binding force in conscience, since 'it is right to obey God rather than men'" (*Pacem in terris* no. 51). "The most

vealed the tendency of modern society to drift increasingly toward *economism*.⁶² The ideas developed by modern social teaching on the issues of *having* and *being* reinvigorated the Church's hostility to the modern world. The Church recognized the accomplishments of the competitive market economies in what was commonly known as the "developed countries." From that point on, its discourse against economic Liberalism and capitalism could no longer be so direct. This did not mean that its discourse would be any less radical. The Church never ceased to condemn the materialism and the utilitarianism of modern society. It fought untiringly for the return to an anthropological basis for religion as the only means to ensure the stability of the social order.

The Church's acknowledgement of the merits of the postwar system of production, which could have been interpreted as its conversion to economic Liberalism, went only so far. On the one hand, the Church kept up its virulent condemnation of capitalism, blaming it for the underdevelopment of the vast majority of countries.⁶³ On the other hand, its criticism of the appropriation of wealth by capital to the detriment of labor are faithful to pre-Vatican II social doctrine. However, its denunciation of *economism* in the developed countries, where *having* took priority over *being*, extended its traditional criticism of the competitive market economy as a means of regulating modern society. The future of developed societies ruled over by materialism was a source of worry for the Vatican II popes, who were fighting to establish an economy designed to serve humanity and defend a social model where economic activity was subordinated to political and moral authority.

Furthermore, the Church continued to promote a Christian approach to economics as an alternative to modern economics. On this point, the primary social documents of the Vatican II era—*Mater et magistra* (1961),

perniciously typical aspect of the modern era consists in the absurd attempt to reconstruct a solid and fruitful temporal order divorced from God, who is, in fact, the only foundation on which it can endure" (*Mater et magistra* no. 217).

⁶² The Church used this neologism (of John Paul II) to call into question the importance of economics in modern society.

⁶³ "Under the driving force of new systems of production, national frontiers are breaking down, and we can see new economic powers emerging, the multinational enterprise, which by the concentration and flexibility of their means can conduct autonomous strategies which are largely independent of the national political powers and therefore not subject to control from the point of view of the common good. By extending their activities, these private organizations can lead to a new and abusive form of economic domination on the social, cultural and even political level. The excessive concentration of means and powers that Pope Pius XI already condemned on the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* is taking on a new and very real image" (*Octogesima adveniens* no. 44).

Pacem in terris (1963), *Populorum progressio* (1967), *Octogesima adveniens* (1971), *Centesimus annus* (1991), and the constitution *Gaudium et spes*—stood apart from their predecessors. Up until World War II, the Church believed it possible to counter the secular science of economics with a Catholic field of scientific thinking, however vague. After the war, however, references by the Church to divine or natural law no longer enjoyed credibility in the scientific world. Consequently, the Church sought to move closer to economic circles whose output it felt was accepted by the scientific community, however heterodox the school of thought. The Church thus supported work on the economics of need, which promoted the idea that an economy should be conceived in order to satisfy human ends. It also turned a benevolent eye to the work and the scientific objectives of the association *Economie et Humanisme*, even if, ironically, the Church misunderstood the intentions of the founders of this Christian association. The popes were hoping to obtain scientific backing for their intransigent policy by referring to research that had its roots in Catholicism and conservatism, whereas the principal aim of the founders of *Economie et Humanisme* was to extricate themselves from the Church's tutelage by replacing Christian thinking with a secular approach to economics.⁶⁴

The vision of an economic system ruled by moral values conforms to a highly traditional representation of society. The popes countered moral relativism with Christian truth. In other words, they defended the merits of a holistic society, structured along the lines of moral norms, against the modern vision of a society subject to the rule of individual rights. Although the discourse was much less aggressive in its form, rarely invoking the term "Christian social order," Vatican II did not signal any substantial change of direction. It defended the merits of institutionally organized charity as opposed to the liberal idea of individual charity. While it took care not to appear remotely socialistic in assigning sole responsibility for social policy to the State, it nevertheless supported the State's intervention in economic and social affairs.

The Vatican II popes remained resolutely antiliberal in their declarations on the right to private property. Yet their encyclicals reaffirmed the subordination of that right to the common good by recognizing the universal purpose of material goods. Private appropriation of property should not lead to exclusion. Were this to happen, the political authorities would have every right to intervene.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ For this analysis I am indebted to Denis Pelletier, *Economie et humanisme: De l'utopie communautaire au combat pour le Tiers-Monde 1941-1966* (Paris: Cerf, 1996).

⁶⁵ "He who has the goods of this world and sees his brother in need and closes

I conclude this presentation of the first category of encyclicals published during the Vatican II era by stressing the permanent nature of the intransigent approach. The Church refused to see faith reduced to a strictly private matter, and by extension it refused to acknowledge that it could no longer exercise any influence, however indirect, over temporal matters. I therefore do not support those who argue that Vatican II radically shifted the Church's methodology.⁶⁶ I agree that there was a change in tone, but this change revealed the evolving nature of the theologico-political issues. With the triumph of modernity, the Church was finding it difficult to enforce its own intellectual field of understanding or its religious-anthropological framework for the conception of morality. It was no longer able to rule over humanity as much as it would like. Consequently, the discourse it developed became less antagonistic, the criticism less political. This new tone demonstrates the Church's will to present the social doctrine as a third way. The Church persisted in its desire to exercise influence in the temporal sphere by putting forward an original model, but it refused to confront the opposition directly on the level of ideology (as defined by Dumont and Poulat), and thus allied itself with recognized scientific circles, however heterodox their approach. I have, however, elucidated the misunderstanding that lay at the heart of the Church's aims. Given that misunderstanding, the Church had no intention of revising its ideological position. Therefore, I argue that the word "doctrine" should always be used in qualifying the Church's social discourse, rather than the word

his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?' Everyone knows that the Fathers of the Church laid down the duty of the rich toward the poor in no uncertain terms. As St. Ambrose put it: 'You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.' These words indicate that the right to private property is not absolute and unconditional. No one may appropriate surplus goods solely for his own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life. In short, 'as the Fathers of the Church and other eminent theologians tell us, the right of private property may never be exercised to the detriment of the common good.' When 'private gain and basic community needs conflict with one another,' it is for the public authorities 'to seek a solution to these questions, with the active involvement of individual citizens and social groups' (*Populorum progressio* no. 23). "If certain landed estates impede the general prosperity because they are extensive, unused or poorly used, or because they bring hardship to peoples or are detrimental to the interests of the country, the common good sometimes demands their expropriation" (*ibid.* no. 24).

⁶⁶ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La doctrine sociale comme idéologie* (Paris: Cerf, 1979) provides the most convincing defense of this argument.

“teaching,” which, in the conciliar texts, is often thought to imply a “shift in meaning.”⁶⁷

JOHN-PAUL II'S ENCYCLICALS: AGGRESSIVE CATHOLICISM

In this final section, I consider the writings of John Paul II. My justification for singling out his contribution to the Church's postconciliar social doctrine is that he adopted a far more aggressive tone. The evolution in the economic situation, on the one hand, and the new-found interest in economic Liberalism, on the other, had more than a little to do with this tone. From 1974 onward, the developed countries entered a long period of serious economic crisis, which in social terms led to increased unemployment. Furthermore, during the 1980s, certain economic theories reemerged that, to the detriment of social redistribution policies under the aegis of the State, promoted a greater role for self-regulating free market forces in solving economic problems. I propose that the Church, under the Polish pope, renewed its condemnation of the modern world, because, in this difficult context, it considered society to be more receptive to its critical point of view. Without the slightest nuance, John Paul presented his assessment of the philosophical mistakes of the Enlightenment, with its “erroneous” conception of liberty, which he held responsible for the tragedy of contemporary human existence. In opposition to Enlightenment thought, he advanced a line of argument that referred to Christian truth (*Veritatis splendor* and *Fides et ratio*). Symbolically, this same aggressive attitude could be found in the new approach to social discourse and the rehabilitation of the term “doctrine.” The Church had no intention of relenting in its condemnation of a society dominated by economic ideology.

More effectively than any of his predecessors, John Paul II placed the debate on an ideological level. He powerfully defended the link between the value system of a given period of history and the economic representations associated with it. Therefore, I can state most emphatically that the significance of his writings concerning the market or capitalism, in particular in *Centesimus annus*, should not be misread. Once again, I maintain that, in its social doctrine, the Church's recognition of the play of market forces and capitalism's production system was no more than a semblance, even if this risked showing up the Church as opportunistic. John Paul denounced the free market with a rare degree of intransigent orthodoxy; he rejected the free market's political role as a mechanism for regulating the social order because it disregarded morally normative constraints. In condemning a world dominated by economic ideology, he hewed to the tra-

⁶⁷ Ibid. 8.

ditional line of his predecessors. In his own name he assumed the critical approach of Vatican II, which condemned modern consumer society, especially in its stance toward *having* and *being*; those who possess cannot *be*, because they *have* too much, and those who *have* nothing also cannot *be*.⁶⁸ The anthropological reference for the modern world, both materialistic and utilitarian, could only lead to a society of individualism and selfishness. John Paul thus exhorted us to rediscover the meaning of the divine in order to *be*. In light of John Paul's radical critique of the *economism* of the modern world, I reject any liberal interpretation of his writings.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ "The Encyclical of Pope Paul VI pointed out the difference, so often emphasized today, between 'having' and 'being,' which had been expressed earlier in precise words by the Second Vatican Council. To 'have' objects and goods does not in itself perfect the human subject, unless it contributes to the maturing and enrichment of that subject's 'being,' that is to say unless it contributes to the realization of the human vocation as such. Of course, the difference between 'being' and 'having,' the danger inherent in a mere multiplication or replacement of things possessed compared to the value of 'being,' need not turn into a contradiction. One of the greatest injustices in the contemporary world consists precisely in this: that the ones who possess much are relatively few and those who possess almost nothing are many. It is the injustice of the poor distribution of the goods and services originally intended for all. This then is the picture: there are some people—the few who possess much—who do not really succeed in 'being' because, through a reversal of the hierarchy of values, they are hindered by the cult of 'having'; and there are others—the many who have little or nothing—who do not succeed in realizing their basic human vocation because they are deprived of essential goods. The evil does not consist in 'having' as such, but in possessing without regard for the quality and the ordered hierarchy of the goods one has. Quality and hierarchy arise from the subordination of goods and their availability to man's 'being' and his true vocation. This shows that although development has a necessary economic dimension, since it must supply the greatest possible number of the world's inhabitants with an availability of goods essential for them 'to be,' it is not limited to that dimension. If it is limited to this, then it turns against those whom it is meant to benefit. The characteristics of full development, one which is 'more human' and able to sustain itself at the level of the true vocation of men and women without denying economic requirements, were described by Paul VI" (*Sollicitudo rei socialis* no. 28).

⁶⁹ The Acton Institute is the main organization speaking out in support of such arguments. The description of the Institute on its Web site leaves no room for ambiguity: "The mission of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty is to promote a free and virtuous society characterized by individual liberty and founded on religious principles. . . . The Acton Institute seeks to make religious leaders and entrepreneurs of all denominations aware of the moral potential of the free market. . . . The Institute organizes seminars aimed at educating tomorrow's religious leaders in the principles and mechanisms of the free market. We stress the moral dimensions of liberty and the free market. We thus support seminarians and active members of the clergy in the just appraisal of the moral potential of free market exchange. We exhort senior executives and company entrepreneurs to in-

The Church's support for a theory of economics thus subordinated to a Christian anthropology naturally reveals in its discourse a holistic vision of society. Whether it be the turmoil in the Communist countries with the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989, or the failure of authorities in other countries to sort out economic problems (unemployment or underdevelopment), the situation was ripe for the Church to express itself. John Paul II proposed a traditional approach to subsidiarity in contrast to the Socialist or Liberal visions of the State.

The theory of private property put forward by John Paul II's social doctrine closely followed that of his predecessors. Keeping Socialism at a distance, he acknowledged the individual right to property. He nevertheless took care to reaffirm that right's subjection to social precedence. In contrast to proponents of Liberal ideology, he clearly stated that this right was neither "absolute" nor "intangible." In the light of this statement, I maintain my appraisal of the intransigent nature of contemporary Catholicism. The writings of John Paul II were, in this respect, continuous with all the previous encyclicals, and yet they represent a sensibility particular to him. This is not due primarily to the pope's personality; a more convincing

tegrate their faith more fully in their professional lives, to give of themselves more unselfishly in their communities, and to strive toward higher standards of ethical conduct in their work. . . . Our primary goal is to facilitate understanding of the theological foundations of market principles and promote liberty, the essential prerequisite for creating opportunities for all" (translated from the French-language pages of <http://www.acton.org> [accessed on 26 June, 2007]). Its current president is Rev. Robert A. Sirico, who co-founded the Institute in 1990 with Kris Alan Mauren. He is also a member of the very Liberal *Société du Mont Pèlerin*. The intellectuals of the Institute base their thinking on the personalist theology of John Paul II in order to establish links with the individualism of the Austrian Liberal school of thought and thus defend the virtues of a free market, which guarantees the freedom of individuals. The Institute's theorists reject any form of kinship with libertarian philosophy, arguing that no society can be properly run without reference to moral precepts that the Church alone can establish. Consequently, they consider that the free market will function all the more successfully as those who engage in contractual exchange behave according to the moral principles promoted by the Church. To gain insight into the Liberal interpretation of *Centesimus annus* as promoted by those intellectuals associated with the Institute, see: Rocco Buttiglione, "Behind *Centesimus annus*"; Michael Novak, "Capitalism with a Heart: The Man They Called the Last Socialist Comes Out in Favor of Free-Market Capitalism," *Crisis* 9 (July–August 1991); Rocco Buttiglione, "The Moral Mandate for Freedom: Reflections on *Centesimus annus*," <http://www.acton.org/publicat/occasionalpapers/rocco.html> (accessed on June 26, 2007); and Richard J. Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 52–53. In France, the ideas developed by Jean-Yves Naudet are perfectly comparable to those promoted by the Institute. See Jean-Yves Naudet, *La liberté pour quoi faire: Centesimus annus et l'économie* (Paris: Mame, 1992).

explanation lies in the evolution of the Church's inherently intransigent response to theologico-political issues. In reaction to the preeminence of the economic dimension in the modern world, the discourse was fundamentally antiliberal. The form of this opposition adapted itself to the relative success of the competitive market economies and the relative increase in people's living standards. The economic crisis that reared its head during the pontificate of John Paul II favored the return to a more political brand of Catholicism. It is this analysis that makes sense of his rejection of a third-way doctrine between Socialism and Liberalism. This refusal in no way implied a lack of ambition as far as the Church's social doctrine was concerned. On the contrary, it revealed the return to a far more ideological position (as defined by Dumont and Poulat). The Church was no longer intent on being accommodating and making do with a middle way. It once more believed in the possible success of defending its system of values in the face of rival ideologies. This interpretation is confirmed by John Paul's descriptions of the modern world as laboring under a structure conducive to sin. In the end, by first declaring that ideology conditions social structure, and then, in the same breath, denouncing contemporary *economism*, he said nothing that did not conform to the most traditional brand of intransigence. He thus called on each individual to mobilize in conscience against the spiritual death purveyed by modern ideology. For John Paul II, Christianity was not to be defined by moral reform alone; it was an alternative ideological solution to the world's ills.

CONCLUSION

This reflection has demonstrated that the Church, via its social doctrine, has perpetuated an intransigent stance. Under Leo XIII, the social doctrine was but one element in the Christian onslaught on modern values. Subsequently, however, the Church felt the need to harken back to the initial encyclical with new publications more attuned to the emerging importance of economy in modern society. While the Church has always claimed to intervene solely in its capacity as a moral authority, its social doctrine has done all in its power to sap the scientific foundations of economics⁷⁰ and thus transform it into a discipline whose "object is a construction of mod-

⁷⁰ Alluding to this specifically modern question of the impenetrable barrier between economics and morality, and thus between the prudent nature of social doctrine and the scientific intention of economic knowledge, Poulat observes that the Church cannot refrain from providing economic lessons. He links the Church's intrusion into the field of economics to the very nature of Catholicism: "Indeed, just like a river that has burst its banks, Catholic discourse can easily become overwhelming and submerge one" (Émile Poulat, "Pensée chrétienne et vie économique," *Foi et développement* 3 (October–December, 1987) 155–57.

ern times.”⁷¹ Beginning with *Rerum novarum* and with each subsequent social encyclical, even after Vatican II, the popes established a link between ideological Liberalism and economic Liberalism. From the point of view of the Church’s social doctrine, the competitive market was not just a technical system; it was a political concept.

The Church established a link between Enlightenment values and the anthropological foundations of the economy. It denounced modern society for replacing the idea of nature with a notion of rights in its conception of humanity and the organization of the political community. The different popes, each in his own way, never failed to lament the impact of this revolution on human values. They all refused to see society subordinated to individual freedom and to allow human and moral purpose to be thus undermined. At the same time, each pope came to the same conclusion regarding the existence of a modern society devoted to promoting the pursuit of individual interest. And thus they could no longer fail to be surprised at seeing humans put material possession above all else and thereby establishing the economy as the primary activity of modern society. They powerfully condemned the vision of the economy inherent in Enlightenment philosophy. They could not stand by and watch the progress of the world give way to the successful functioning of the market economy.

As for the natural harmony of individual interest, which, according to the teaching of the economists, is considered to be the consequence of the competitive functioning of the market, the social teaching of the Church considers this “harmony” a myth. Even if it could generally be admitted that economics is a science that reduces the whole field of knowledge to one component whose sole scope is that of elucidating political choices, the popes of the Vatican II era have nonetheless always condemned the individualistic, utilitarian, and materialistic anthropological foundations on which economists work. They do not consider the market as society’s sole regulatory tool for guaranteeing personal liberty by protecting the individual against all forms of subordination. On the contrary, they look upon the market as an institution serving the interests of the most powerful. In the popes’ eyes, the market brings with it a world of enslavement, alienation, and exploitation. As Poulat puts it, “in affirming the primacy of ethics,” the Church “has always refused to abandon the world’s progress to the blind laws of the economy.”⁷²

For my part, I have sought to demonstrate the intransigent nature of the whole corpus of the Church’s social doctrine. Catholicism today remains

⁷¹ I borrow this expression from Dumont to recall the approach developed in my introduction, which presented the social doctrine’s analysis of the economy as “stamped with the mark of ideology” (in Dumont and Poulat’s sense).

⁷² Poulat, *Église contre bourgeoisie* 50.

firmly opposed to modernity and, in this respect, opposed to Liberalism and Socialism. The Church refuses to accept the modern representation of economics, which goes hand in hand with the system of values born of the Enlightenment. The social doctrine should, therefore, be understood as the defense of an alternative philosophical system, from which a conception of humanity and society—and, by extension, a particular approach to apprehending the whole economic sphere—can be derived.

This intransigent approach has, of course, evolved to the point of becoming unrecognizable. However, this is an issue of form and not of fundamental content. Little does it matter if there is no stylistic continuity from one pope to another. The forms of the discourse vary according to “the contingent circumstances of time and culture.”⁷³

⁷³ Émile Poulat, *L'Église c'est un monde* (Paris: Cerf, 1986) 14.