



Themes and Theologies in Catholic Social Teaching over Fifty Years

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Abstract

This article has three sections, covering three themes in CST. In the first I sketch out the development of an integral humanistic approach and then go on to suggest that the ‘flip’ side of this is an unduly anthropocentric stance on ecological issues by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict. In the second section I give an account of official Catholic teaching on justice for women and their equality with men. I suggest that over the past fifty years there have been major advances on this issue. But John Paul’s concept of the complementarity of women and men raises great difficulties—particularly insofar as it is used as one of the main justifications for Vatican insistence that the Church does not have the authority to ordain women. In the third section I examine Vatican views on the appropriate means which Church authorities and the Church membership should use in working to promote justice. Should Church leaders limit themselves to clarifying the nature of authentic development, pointing out various forms of injustice, calling for change, and suggesting an alternative ‘economy of communion’? May they ever go further than such ‘education of consciences’, by encouraging the poor to struggle for justice, and by themselves confronting oppressive governments?

Keywords

Humanistic approach, anthropocentric, justice for women, complementarity, confrontation by Church leaders, ‘economy of communion’.

Introduction

I propose to look at three themes in Catholic social teaching and at the theologies which underpin them. They are (1) Integral Humanism and Anthropocentric Approach; (2) Women: Justice, Equality and

Complementarity; and (3) The Means the Church Should Use in Working for Justice.

First Theme: Integral Humanism and Anthropocentric Approach

When I began to study theology in the 1950s, one of our courses in what was called ‘Dogmatic Theology’ was ‘The Theology of Creation’. During the 1960s this course was widely replaced by a course called ‘Theological Anthropology’. In many respects this was a very valuable development; it was part of what has been called ‘The Turn to the Subject’ and it led to a far deeper understanding of what it means to be human in the world. However, I shall suggest that we are slowly coming to realize that it needs to be situated within the much wider context of a theology of creation as a whole. A true understanding of ourselves as human can only take place within an earth-centred or creation-centred approach. In the present section of this article I propose to look first at the development of an integral humanistic theology in Catholic social teaching and then at the development of its teaching on ecology.

INTEGRAL HUMANISM

The humanistic theme began to take shape in the two social encyclicals of John XXIII, *Mater et magistra* and *Pacem in terris*. They pulled the Catholic Church out of its ghetto mentality and encouraged it to recognize the reality of the Western world where the main way of dealing with poverty is through government action and where defence of human rights is a central moral issue.

A really big break-through came with the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II. Already the four key words ‘joys, hopes, grief and anguish’ in its opening line indicate that it represents a quite dramatic openness to the reality of human life in the world. And the whole document is very humanistic in its content and style – in fact, looking back many theologians suggest that it was unduly optimistic in its account of the relationship of the Church to the world.

Pope Paul VI continued this humanistic approach. In *Populorum progressio* (1967) he dealt with the issue of justice and poverty on a world-wide basis and also put forward a valuable account of the very nature of human development. In *Octogesima adveniens* (1971) he took this a stage further by recognizing that economic development can be furthered or blocked by political decisions. In *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1976) he put forward a rich and comprehensive account

of the whole concept of human liberation in all its dimensions. In the meantime the document issued by the 1971 Synod of Bishops had stated that action on behalf of justice is a 'constitutive dimension' of evangelization. This was a truly major step in distancing the Church from a dualistic approach which would give a secondary place to the promotion of a fully human life in this world.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

In my opinion the two high-points of John Paul's teaching on Catholic social teaching came in his very first encyclical *Redemptor hominis* (1979) and in his first social encyclical *Laborem exercens* (1981). The former is particularly important in terms of the present topic. In it the pope put forward a quite radical theological basis for a humanistic approach. He wrote: '...the human person is the primary and fundamental way for the Church'; and he added at once that it is 'the way traced out by Christ himself...' So he saw it as 'the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission' (RH 14). In his address to the United Nations in 1979, John Paul insisted on the importance of what he called 'the humanistic criterion' as the basis for assessing various systems (AAS 71, 1156 [§ 17]).

These statements assure us about the real meaning of what John Paul meant whenever he stressed the primacy of the spiritual—as he did in the encyclical itself (RH 11) as well as in his 1979 address to the Puebla Conference (III, 4) and in his address to the United Nations (§ 4). It did *not* mean that he was adopting a dualist theology. Rather his theology was integrally humanistic. His vision of the human was one that includes the economic, the political, the cultural, and the religious. What he meant by 'the spiritual' was the deepest and most fundamental aspects of all of these human dimensions of life on this earth. He believed that we Christians who follow Jesus are called to explore what it means to live a fully human life; and we do so by paying particular attention to whatever we find to be deepest in all of these dimensions of human experience.

The second high-point in John Paul's contribution to Catholic social teaching came two years later with his encyclical *Laborem exercens*. Here he took the quite radical step of defining the person as a *worker*. He went on to engage in a very serious dialogue with Marxism. He was grounding his humanist position in a realistic account of human life in its economic and political reality.

This humanistic approach was brought a stage further in *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987). In it John Paul put forward a careful and valuable analysis of the concept of *solidarity* both as a *fact*, a human reality, and as a vital human *virtue*.

ECOLOGY¹

Already in 1971 Pope Paul VI in *Octogesima adveniens* mentions the risk associated with ‘an ill-considered exploitation of nature’ (OA 21). Later that year the document ‘Justice in the World’ issued by the Synod of Bishops, no doubt influenced by Barbara Ward-Jackson who was a consultant before and during the gathering, is far more specific, pointing out that irreparable damage would be done to the environment if the consumption and pollution practices of the richer nations were extended to the whole of humankind (JW 11). This document makes a firm link between ecology and justice.

A few years later, Pope John Paul II in his very first encyclical, referred to ‘the threat of pollution of the natural environment’ (RH 8) and the fact that humans frequently look on the natural environment only insofar as it serves them ‘for immediate use and consumption’ (RH 15). In *Sollicitudo rei socialis* he returned to the issue of ecology in a passage where he referred to ‘the limits of available resources’ (SRS 26) and a later passage where he noted that ‘natural resources are limited’ (SRS 34). In the first of these passages he referred to ‘the integrity and cycles of nature’ (SRS 26). His use here of the word ‘integrity’ echoes the phrase ‘integrity of creation’ which had already been accepted by the World Council of Churches.² Without using this exact term, John Paul gave a brief account what is meant by ‘the integrity of creation’ by pointing out that each being is connected to other beings, where there is ‘mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the “cosmos”’ (SRS 34).

However, the Vatican was slower than the WCC in giving a prominent place to the ecological question. The first major Vatican statement on this topic was Pope John Paul’s ‘Message for the World Day of Peace’ on 1 January 1990. It speaks movingly of ‘the plundering of natural resources and . . . a progressive decline in the quality of life’, and of ‘the widespread destruction of the environment’ (§ 1). It goes on to insist that, ‘no peaceful society can afford to neglect either respect for life or the fact that there is an integrity to creation’ (§ 7). It points out that the ecological problem cannot be solved unless modern society ‘takes a serious look at its life style’. It insists that: ‘Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become a part of everyday life . . .’ (§ 13).

Having recognized that there is an integrity in creation, the Message puts forward three reasons why we should respect this integrity.

¹ In this broad survey of various topics in Catholic social teaching, I can only look quite briefly at some of the documents in which ecological issues are treated. For a more detailed account see ‘Joining in the Dance: Catholic Social Teaching and Ecology’ by Celia Deane-Drummond, elsewhere in this issue.

² See Donal Dorr, *The Social Justice Agenda: Justice, Ecology, Power and the Church*, (Orbis Books 1991) pp. 73–4.

The first of these is simply that humans are called to respect the plan of God (§ 5).

The second reason why humans should respect the integrity of creation is the one to which most of the message is devoted. It is that respect for the environment is necessary for the present and future welfare and health of humanity. The Message insists that ‘the earth is ultimately *a common heritage, the fruits of which are for the benefit of all*’ (§ 8). It is quite clear that in this context the ‘all’ who are to benefit are all *humans*.

There is also a rather brief mention of a third reason why we should respect the integrity of creation. The Message says that ‘*the aesthetic value of creation cannot be overlooked*’ and adds:

Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity. The Bible speaks again and again of the goodness and beauty of creation, which is called to glorify God (cf. Gen 1:4ff; Ps 8:2; 104:1ff; Wis 13:3–5; Sir 39:16, 33; 43:1, 9) (§ 14).

This is both true and important. But it seems to suggest that the value of the non-human parts of nature springs mainly from the fact that contemplation of them can bring peace and serenity to *humans*.

In the final paragraph of the Message the pope goes some way towards suggesting that the non-human parts of nature have a value in their own right: ‘Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation, which is called to join man in praising God’. It refers to human ‘fraternity’ with other parts of nature and our duty to care for them, but adds that this is to be done ‘in light of that greater and higher fraternity that exists within the human family’ (§ 16). Once again we are left with the impression of a reluctance to acknowledge the inherent value of the non-human world, without immediately insisting on the ‘higher’ value of humanity.

All this suggests that the approach of the pope is still fundamentally anthropocentric – even in the way he understands the phrase ‘the integrity of creation’. In this and in subsequent Vatican documents one cannot avoid noticing that there is a reluctance to give unconditional recognition to the intrinsic value of the non-human parts of creation.

In the case of Pope John Paul this can be partly explained as ‘the flip side’ of the valuable humanistic approach that he brought to Catholic social teaching and indeed to his understanding of evangelization. The Vatican authorities were reacting excessively against a rather extreme version of ‘deep ecology’ – one which would be pantheistic, denying the transcendence of God. It would also reject or play down the distinctiveness of humans, claiming that the ‘rights’ of animals and plants are equal to those of humans – if not in fact superior to them.

CENTESIMUS ANNUS

In 1991, on the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul issued a new social encyclical. As one might have expected, it was called *Centesimus annus*. Once again, John Paul's approach can be termed integrally humanistic. It is quite significant that the heading of Section 6 of the encyclical is 'Man is the Way of the Church'. His treatment of environmental issues is unapologetically anthropocentric. For instance, referring back to Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*, he says that 'man . . . is the only creature on earth which God has willed for its own sake' (CA 53).

The encyclical fails to emphasise the extent to which, in our present-day world, economic challenges can only be tackled successfully in the context of the ecological problems that threaten the continued existence of human society – not to mention the destruction of thousands of animal and plant species.

The pope does indeed advert to the human duty to respect the integrity of creation but he sees this in terms of obedience to God's plan, with no explicit reference to the order and value which is *inherent* in the created world. He does not put much emphasis on the value of non-human creatures, or on how important it is that humans should live in partnership with the rest of creation. In so far as he locates humanity within the much wider context of creation as a whole, he does it in a manner that emphasises human superiority and responsibility.

The pope's strong anthropocentric stance is particularly evident in the way that he contrasts natural ecology with 'human ecology'. He acknowledges that the destruction of the natural environment is a 'worrying' question. But almost immediately he puts it in second place when compared with 'the more serious destruction of the human environment'; here he refers to 'the serious problems of modern urbanization' and 'the need for urban planning' (CA 38). The difficulty here is the sharp contrast he makes between 'human ecology' and 'natural' ecology. The term 'human ecology' *includes* our relationship to nature. So it seems inappropriate to contrast it with 'natural ecology' – except when the latter term is wrongly taken in a more restricted sense that fails to include humans in the natural order.³

The overall conclusion I come to from a study of the many documents and addresses of Pope John Paul is that he made a very valuable contribution to Catholic social teaching by adopting an

³ Deane-Drummond, who has generously shown me the text of her article, reads this and similar passages in a more benign way, seeing the pope's account of 'human ecology' as particularly valuable. It would be inappropriate for me to respond to this in the present article. I propose to treat this whole topic in more detail in the greatly expanded new edition of my book *Option for the Poor* which is to be published by Orbis Books this year [2012].

integrally humanistic approach. He also made a very notable contribution to the teaching on ecology. But he did not move on from a nuanced anthropocentric view to adopt the kind of earth-centred or creation-centred approach that many theologians have now come to recognize as the way forward for Christian theology today.

POPE BENEDICT

It is generally recognized that Pope Benedict is very concerned about environmental issues. He is deeply committed to raising awareness about the urgency of finding solutions to ecological problems and promoting an ecologically respectful lifestyle. However, Benedict's approach to ecological issues has continued in the anthropocentric line adopted by John Paul. He insists on the inseparable link between natural ecology and 'human ecology' (e.g. his Message for the World Day of Peace of 2007, entitled 'If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation' and his 'Address to the Diplomatic Corps' on 11 January 2010.) In his 'Message' for the 2008 'Fraternity Campaign' of the Brazilian bishops, Benedict followed John Paul in insisting that 'human ecology' takes priority;⁴ and in his Address to ambassadors from six African countries he maintained that 'human ecology is an imperative'.

Pope Benedict's second social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* is dated 29 June 2009. In this encyclical he insists strongly on our duty to respect the environment, making it clear that this is part of his integral view of authentic human living (see CIV 48 to CIV 51; cf. CIV 67, CIV 69). As he puts it: 'The book of nature is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a word, integral human development' (CIV 51).

Benedict's emphasis on the concept of gift applies particularly to the environment, which he sees as 'God's gift to everyone' with its own inbuilt order. He insists that it must not be treated as 'raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure' (CIV 48). In a felicitous passage he says that nature 'is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a "grammar" which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation'. It would only be a short step for him to go from this 'grammar' of nature to affirming that every part of nature has its own inherent value: but he does not take this final step. Presumably this is because of his fear that this could lead to 'attitudes of neo-paganism or a new pantheism' (CIV 48).

⁴ <http://tisk.cirkev.cz/en/vatican/brazilian-fraternity-campaign-this-year-about-defence-of-life/> (accessed 14 June 2011); cf. Address to ambassadors from six African countries: 'human ecology is an imperative' <http://www.theafricanews.com/news-italy/2674-pope-qhuman-ecology-is-an-imperative.html> (accessed 14 June 2011).

Benedict maintains that humans are called to exercise ‘a *responsible stewardship over nature*, in order to protect it, to enjoy its fruits and to cultivate it in new ways’. He goes on to point out the need for ‘an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of *new life-styles*’ (CIV 50). He also reminds us ‘how many natural resources are squandered by wars’ (CIV 51).

‘If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation’. This was the title of Pope Benedict’s ‘Message for World Day of Peace 2010’. In it he expanded on a point that had already been touched on by John Paul in his encyclical *Pastores gregis* (§ 70) and by himself in *Caritas in Veritate* (CIV 48). A key passage is: ‘A *greater sense of intergenerational solidarity* is urgently needed. Future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of our use of common environmental resources’ (§ 8). Linking this with the need for solidarity between ‘developing countries and highly industrialized countries’ he called for ‘*a solidarity which embraces time and space*’ (§ 8).

It is a pity that Benedict, who is so committed on environmental issues, did not locate everything he has to say about human responsibility and business activity in this time of *economic* crisis within the broader context of the *ecological* crisis of our time. Like John Paul, he adopts an older anthropocentric paradigm, where ecological issues are treated almost entirely in terms of *human* concerns. What is needed today, however, is a kind of Copernican revolution, leading to a major paradigm shift. We need to locate all our human concerns—and especially our approach to economics—within the context of a geocentric and cosmic vision.

Second Theme: Women: Justice, Equality and Complementarity

Catholic social teaching over the past fifty years on the topic of women has a very mixed record. It remains some way behind attitudes in most Protestant Churches and in the secular world. Nevertheless, it has made major advances in some respects, but in the public perception these have been largely offset by Vatican intransigence on the issue of the ordination of women.

The Vatican II Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, struck a rather uneasy balance between, on the one hand, recognizing the public role of women ‘in accordance with their own nature’ (GS 60) and, on the other hand, insisting that their ‘domestic role . . . must be safely preserved’ (GS 52).

Six years later, the document ‘Justice in the World’ issued by the 1971 Roman Synod of Bishops said: ‘We . . . urge that women should have their due share of responsibility and participation in the community life of society and likewise of the Church’ (JW 42: I

have translated the Latin word *propria* as ‘due’ rather than as ‘their own’ which is the usual English translation). The document went on to make this important proposal: ‘We propose that this matter be subjected to a serious study employing adequate means: for instance, a mixed commission of men and women, religious and lay people, of differing situations and competence’ (JW 43). Unfortunately the proposal of a mixed commission was never taken up and is still hanging in the air.

INTER INSIGNIORES

In 1976 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document called *Inter insigniores* which insisted that only men could be ordained. It said that this is ‘the type of ordained ministry willed by the Lord Jesus Christ and carefully maintained by the Apostles The Church’s tradition in the matter has . . . been . . . firm . . .’ (§ 1). It maintained that Jesus ‘did not call any women to become part of the Twelve’; and this was not just in order ‘to conform to the customs of his time’ (§ 2). It added that the apostle Paul did not allow women to have ‘the official function of teaching in the Christian assembly’ (§ 4). It referred to the unbroken tradition throughout the history of the Church’ (§ 4). Ultimately, it said, it is ‘the voice of the *Magisterium* that . . . decides what . . . must remain immutable’. It then invoked ‘the analogy of faith’ saying that ‘the priest in the exercise of his ministry does not act in his own name’; a ‘natural resemblance’ must exist between Christ and his minister so that people can ‘see in the minister the image of Christ’ (§ 5). Finally it insisted that ‘the priesthood does not form part of the rights of the individual’ (§ 6).

LABOREM EXERCENS (1981)

Paragraph 19 of Pope John Paul’s encyclical, *Laborem exercens* can be seen as a major advance in the Church’s thinking and teaching on the topic of women and work. In referring to ‘the head of the family’ the Latin text uses the word ‘*homo*’ rather than ‘*vir*’ (the Italian text is ‘*persona adulta*’); and uses the word ‘spouse’ rather than the word ‘wife’. The pope insists that society should make it possible for a mother to take care of her children without penalizing her or discriminating against her for doing so. Mothers should not be forced to abandon the care of their children and take up paid work outside the home. In a crucially important parenthesis he says this should be done ‘without inhibiting her freedom’. By inserting these words he is affirming a point made by many in the women’s movement: a woman should have the economic freedom to devote time to her young children *if she chooses to do so*.

John Paul insists that work in the public sphere should be organized in such a way that ‘women do not have to pay for their advancement

by abandoning what is specific to them and at the expense of the family'. So he is agreeing with the demand of the women's movement that women should not be forced to fit into the present male-oriented economic system. On the other hand, some of his words suggest that he still holds on to a more traditional view: he speaks of the 'primary goals of the mission of a mother' as 'taking care of her children and educating them in accordance with their needs'.

There seems, then, to be a real ambivalence in the message of *Laborem exercens*. Its wording seems to have been carefully chosen to avoid the accusation that it is reaffirming the traditional teaching that a woman's place is in the home. On the other hand it does not clearly dissociate itself from that older view of the nature and role of women. The failure of the pope himself and of other Church leaders to highlight the quite radical new elements in the encyclical's teaching about women meant that the media and ordinary readers of the encyclical saw it simply as reaffirming the Church's traditional teaching on women. The resulting disappointment and anger have increased greatly as a result of later Church statements and actions in relation to the ordination of women.

FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO 1981

John Paul's Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* insists on 'the equal dignity and responsibility of women with men' and the right of women 'to access to public functions' (FC 22). But it adds that 'the true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of their maternal and family role, by comparison with all other public roles and all other professions' (FC 23). In these words, the pope seems to suggest that the maternal and family role of women is *more important* than their public functions.

MULIERIS DIGNITATEM 1988

Seven years later, Pope John Paul issued his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*. It strongly asserts that women must not be 'dominated' by men – and this is linked to a repeated emphasis on the equality and equal dignity of women and men. In it the pope maintained that just as Eve is the helpmate of Adam, so also he is her helpmate (MD 7). He was quite radical in interpreting Genesis to mean that the wife is a helpmate to the husband and is 'subject to' him only in the same sense as the husband is a helpmate and 'subject to' her; each is called to be at the service of the other (MD 7). And he maintained that Ephesians (5:22–3) is to be understood, not as a one-way subjection of the wife to her husband, but as a subjection of each to the other.

However, this document also has a strong and quite controversial emphasis on a particular conception of the complementarity of women and men. It held that women and men are equal but different;

and each is complementary to the other. John Paul maintained that the 'ontological' nature of women is invariant and transcends all social and cultural conditioning (MD 29). The 'fulfilment' of the woman as a person must be on the basis of her 'personal resources of femininity' (MD 10). For him, motherhood involves a special openness to new life and this openness to the other is a predisposition of all women (MD 18). On the basis of his account of the specific nature of woman, he insisted that women cannot be ordained. He claimed that in celebrating the Eucharist the priest as a man acts 'in *persona Christi*' (MD 26).

ORDINATIO SACERDOTALIS 1994

In this Apostolic Letter John Paul wrote: 'I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful' (§ 4).

'LETTER TO WOMEN' 1995

In the following year John Paul wrote a 'Letter to Women'. In it he said: 'Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude.' He then offered what might be called a conditional apology, saying: 'if objective blame . . . has belonged to not just a few members of the Church, for this I am truly sorry' (§ 3). He condemned sexual violence against women (§ 5) and said that the process of women's liberation has been 'substantially a positive one', which 'must go on!' (§ 6). He then repeated his views about the equality and complementarity of women, referring to what he called the '*genius of women*' (§ 10).

INFALLIBLE?

In October 1995 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a statement (*Responsum ad Dubium*), signed by its prefect Cardinal Ratzinger, stating that 'the teaching that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women is to be understood as belonging to the deposit of faith', which 'has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium'.

In 1998, the same Congregation issued a '*Doctrinal Commentary*' on John Paul's *Motu Proprio, Ad tuendam fidem* in which it insisted that the doctrine that priestly ordination is reserved only to men 'has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.'

These statements caused consternation among those who believed that the issue of the ordination of women was still an open question. However, some argued that the issue was still not definitively

resolved, since the statements by the Congregation could not themselves be seen as infallible statements.

OBJECTIONS

While welcoming the advances made by the popes on the issue of equality and justice for women, feminist theologians and many others reject John Paul's account of the ontological nature of women. They see it as *a priori* rather than based on a study of 'the facts on the ground'.

Anthropological study has shown that in all, or practically all, cultures there is a complementarity and in most cultures men are seen as superior to women. However, there is also a wide variation in *personal* differences between women and men within any particular culture.

In the light of recent advances in neuroscience we can begin to determine which aspects of sexual and gender differentiation are truly universal, transcending cultural differences. At first sight this research seems to provide evidence to support John Paul's view that women are ontologically different from men. For instance, it shows that the surge of the hormone oxytocin at the time of birth tends to bring about a close bond between mother and child.

But the new knowledge calls in question the whole notion of a fixed one-size-fits-all 'ontological' nature in women or men. In the development of the foetus the hormone DHT affects the *body* of some fetuses and causes them to develop male *sexual* characteristics. On the other hand, the hormone oestrogen has an effect is on the *brain* and therefore more directly on the *mind* of the foetus. So it leads to *gender* differentiation as distinct from *sexual* differentiation. These processes do not work in an 'all-or-nothing' manner. In some cases there is a very close correlation between sexual differentiation and gender differentiation, while in other cases the correlation is much less close. In fact there is a whole series of possibilities, all within the range of what can be called 'natural'. In a small minority of cases 'individuals who look like men on the outside can come to feel like women on the inside' and *vice versa*.⁵ The fact that it is unusual does not mean that it should be called 'unnatural'; it is simply a result of the way that the biological hormonal process works in these cases.

We live in a world where gradation is of the very nature of things; so the differences between women and men can be measured only in statistical terms. This indicates that to speak of the 'ontological nature' of women simply does not take account of the complexity of reality. It calls in question the pope's claim that the

⁵ Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*, New York (Oxford University Press: 1998) p. 232.

'ontological nature' of women is such that they cannot be ordained as priests.

A second objection put forward to the pope's conception of complementarity is that he unconsciously accepts as universally normative some of the traditional patriarchal Western attitudes and beliefs about women. Consequently he puts on women the main responsibility and burden of displaying the 'feminine' qualities of being caring, compassionate, and nurturing.

LETTER ON THE COLLABORATION OF MEN AND WOMEN 2004

Towards the very end of John Paul's long pontificate the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued a 'Letter to the Bishops of the Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World'. In line with John Paul's position it insists that between men and women there is a 'physical, psychological and ontological complementarity' (§ 8). It maintains that 'women's physical capacity to give life' is 'a reality that structures the female personality in a profound way'. It explains that 'what John Paul II has termed *the genius of women*' is 'a singular capacity to persevere in adversity, to keep life going even in extreme situations'. This 'implies first of all that women be significantly and actively present in the family', and 'also that women should be present in the world of work...and...should have access to positions of responsibility' (§ 13). It insists that 'the reservation of priestly ordination solely to men does not hamper in any way women's access to the heart of Christian life' (§ 16).

The document acknowledges that 'the feminine values mentioned here are above all human values'. But it claims that 'women are more immediately attuned to these values' and 'are the reminder and the privileged sign of such values' (§ 14). Feminists and others hold that even this more nuanced position still puts a one-sided onus on women to be the main 'carriers' of these values. So they see this as just a more subtle way of reaffirming the pope's conception of complementarity. They maintain that the various scriptural, historical, and theological arguments against women's ordination – as well as the whole concept of 'ontological complementarity' – are simply ideological justifications put forward to provide 'cover' for a deeply ingrained unwillingness to allow women a genuine equality in the Catholic Church.

Writing in *The Tablet*, Tina Beattie said that this document is deeply indebted to feminist thinking, but that this is not acknowledged. She noted that 'the majority of feminists agree that women are more relational than men'. Beattie said that the document represents 'a significant breakthrough in terms of anthropology and sociology'.

But ‘on the level of theology’ it represents ‘a devastating catastrophe’, because the idea that there is an *essential* difference between the sexes is not part of the Catholic tradition. She argued very cogently that ‘the theology underlying this new sexual essentialism is potentially disastrous’.⁶ And so the debate continues.

The controversy about the infallibility issue took a new turn in May 2011, when Pope Benedict removed the Australian Bishop Morris from office. Bishop Morris reported that, in a letter written to him by Benedict, the pope stated that Pope John Paul II defined the teaching on women priests ‘irrevocably and infallibly’.⁷ The fact that Benedict repeated as pope the position he had already taken in 1995 and 1998 when head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith adds a new seriousness to this issue.

Without playing down the crucial significance of the issue of women’s ordination, it must be said that the fact that it has assumed such prominence has had one unfortunate effect. It means that this issue has largely eclipsed other important developments. The effect is that many Church-people and others have little awareness of the major advances that have taken place since Vatican II in the Church’s teaching on justice for women.

Third Theme: The Means the Church Should Use in Working for Justice

Just fifty years ago there came a major breakthrough in Catholic social teaching. In his first social encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*, John XXIII effectively abandoned the corporatist vocational ‘third way’ that had been proposed by Pius XI thirty years previously as an alternative to both capitalism and socialism. Pope John settled instead for a social democratic version of Western capitalist society. In sharp contrast to his predecessors, he called for a wide variety of State social services—in effect a ‘welfare State’ model of society. This had the effect of shifting the official Church from being seen as an ally of those on the right-wing to being seen as closer to those on the left-wing: new allies and new enemies.

Five years later, Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* reaffirmed Pope John’s approach and shared his unduly optimistic view of the western model of development. It also contributed a further radical break with the past by expressing willingness to relinquish acquired rights and privileges when that is appropriate (GS 76.5).

⁶ Tina Beattie, ‘Feminism, Vatican Style’, *The Tablet*, 7 August 2004. On page 309 of her book *New Catholic Feminism*, Beattie suggests that there are resources within the Catholic tradition for ‘a maternal priesthood alongside the masculine priesthood’.

⁷ See John Allen’s column in NCR website of 9 May 2011.

In 1967, Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* broadened the agenda by calling for a new economic order at the *international* level. It also called for an international political authority—in effect a much strengthened United Nations. Furthermore, it put forward an integral concept of development embracing economic, political, cultural, social and religious dimensions. It came out strongly against violent revolution, but a careful parenthesis suggested that in certain extreme cases such a revolution might perhaps be justified (PP 31).

Pope Paul's *Octogesima Adveniens* in 1971 was a partial response to the radical programme of the Medellín Conference. It recognized that economic problems require political solutions. Equally important was its recognition of the need for an *inductive* approach to social problems. But Pope Paul still shrank from an openly confrontational approach; he hoped that change could come through consensus.

The Roman Synod of bishops in 1971 produced a quite radical document, *Justice in the World*. It questioned the myths of development—especially the assumption that Western-style development could be applied all over the world. One crucially important element was its assertion that action on behalf of justice is a *constitutive* dimension of the preaching of the gospel. Another was its insistence that the Church must practice justice in its own life and structures.

There was a strong and sustained effort by significant Vatican people to replace the word 'constitutive' by the word 'integral'. This would suggest that justice is not absolutely essential to the life of the Church but pertains rather to its fullness. This view was held by those who rejected liberation theology and did not believe that Church leaders should encourage the poor to actively resist their oppression.

Following on from the 1974 Roman Synod of Bishops, Paul VI issued *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in 1975. It gave a positive and comprehensive account of liberation, committing the institutional Church to working for the transformation of society and refusing to make a sharp distinction between the spiritual and the temporal.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

In 1978, John Paul became pope and just three months later he went to the 1979 Puebla Conference in Mexico. There he spoke out strongly against a politicization of evangelization but also affirmed the concept of 'an option for the poor', in a nuanced way which indicated that though it is 'preferential' it is not 'exclusive'. He also put to rest (at least temporarily) the controversy about whether the commitment to justice is 'constitutive' or only 'integral'. He did this by saying that it is 'indispensable'. A few weeks later in his first encyclical *Redemptor hominis* he said that the Church considers

concern for humankind, to be ‘an *essential* element of the Church’s own mission *inextricably* linked to it’ (RH 15 – emphasis added).

John Paul went to Brazil in 1980 and to the Philippines in 1981. Addresses which he gave to poor slum-dwellers in Alagados in Brazil and in Tondo in the Philippines are particularly important. There he encouraged the poor to ‘struggle for life’, to be actively involved in shaping their own destiny, and to be ‘artisans of their own progress’. Two years later, in his major social encyclical *Laborem Exercens* he broke new ground by engaging in a serious dialogue with Marxism. Although he did not accept the notion of ‘class struggle’, he did accept the importance of a *struggle* for justice.

In the remaining years of John Paul’s papacy, though he still insisted strongly on social justice, he seems to have backed off from encouraging the poor to struggle for justice and liberation. Perhaps this was partly because of his clash with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1983. He may also have been influenced by the views of Cardinal Ratzinger who had severe reservations about the whole approach of the liberation theologians. In 1984 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Ratzinger issued an ‘Instruction on Certain Aspects of “The Theology of Liberation”’ harshly condemning it for accepting Marxist positions and politicizing the gospel. Two years later the same Congregation issued a second document, entitled ‘An Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation’. It presented a more balanced approach. John Paul’s 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, while condemning both East and West, did not offer any deep social analysis and did not emphasise the need for the poor to take an active role in their own liberation.

When John Paul visited Southern Africa in 1989, many were deeply disappointed that he did not speak out more strongly in support of the struggle of the poor for liberation. And in 1991, he seemed more reserved during his second visit to Brazil, apart from his strong emphasis on respect for indigenous cultures.

There was gloating from right-wing Catholics when the pope wrote harsh words about a bureaucratic type of Welfare State in the 1991 encyclical *Centesimus annus* (CA 48). In fact, however, in the light of his reaffirmation of ‘the preferential option for the poor’ (CA 11), it may be better to see these words as being fully in line with Catholic tradition on subsidiarity. They can be seen as a protest against an approach which cripples the initiative of the poor rather than empowering and liberating them. Unfortunately, the pope did not make this clear in the encyclical or later.

POPE BENEDICT XVI

Pope Benedict’s first encyclical *Deus caritas est* (2005–6) has a very rich treatment of love in its first part. But in part two it makes a sharp contrast between the charitable role of the Church, which

it sees as essential, and its role in relation to justice, which it sees as only *indirect* (DCE 29). This language gives the impression that Benedict is somehow playing down the importance of justice. That is too simple an interpretation. But the encyclical as a whole seems to be suggesting that the institutional Church or Church leaders should never intervene directly in political issues and should concentrate on educating the laity to work for justice.

If we take this at face value it raises very serious questions. It seems quite appropriate that Church leaders in democratic countries should not normally intervene directly in what we might call party politics. But what about the situation where a repressive government is guilty of serious oppression and denial of human rights to its citizens? Would Benedict disapprove of the call of Archbishop Romero to soldiers not to shoot their fellow-citizens? Or of the action of Archbishop Denis Hurley in marching against apartheid?

Furthermore, the question arises whether this encyclical adverts to the fact that CAFOD and SCIAF, which are staffed almost entirely by lay people, are nevertheless agencies of the official Church. The encyclical seems to be suggesting that these agencies should concentrate on giving charitable relief and should no longer be engaged in political campaigning on issues such as human rights abuses or environmental degradation.⁸ If so, this seems like a major backward step from the way Catholic social teaching has been implemented in practice in recent decades.

Benedict's 2009 encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (2009) makes a major contribution to Catholic social teaching. Having stressed the complementarity of justice and love, it puts forward a powerful critique of systemic injustice, and condemns neo-colonialism, hedge funds, and the outsourcing of production to countries where workers are exploited. Perhaps its most important contribution is Benedict's emphasis on *gift*. This leads to his proposal, taken over from the Focolare movement, for an alternative 'economy of communion', one which incorporates an element of gift. This is an economy which does not aim exclusively at making profit but which also has social purposes, such as providing employment, offering real fulfilment to employees, bringing benefits to the local community, and protecting the environment.

However, a significant point to note is that of its nature this 'economy of communion' is one which has to be developed by lay people rather than by the institutional Church. So this proposal fits quite well with Benedict's stance on the respective roles of the laity and the official Church in *Deus caritas est*.

⁸ I hope to write more extensively about *Deus caritas est* in the forthcoming expanded edition of my book *Option for the Poor*.

A SPECTRUM OF OPTIONS

I believe that Benedict's proposal is a very valuable one, though it is not really original, since several enterprises established by members of the Quakers (Society of Friends) over a hundred years ago were based on the same principles. But it would, I believe, be a serious mistake to hold that 'the economy of communion', plus 'the education of consciences' are the *only* two ways, or even the two *main* ways, in which the Catholic Church should promote justice.

There is a whole spectrum of options, each of which may be the most appropriate in different circumstances. At what one might call the left-hand end of the spectrum is direct confrontation with an oppressive government by Church leaders like Oscar Romero. At the right-hand end of the spectrum is the situation which pertains in some countries where Catholic schools and/or hospitals are part of the State system, fully funded by the State. In between, come such activities as lobbying of government by Church leaders, establishing pilot programmes, and raising awareness of Christians and others through advertisements, school programmes etc. Church leaders and Church agencies have to make strategic decisions about where best to locate themselves on this spectrum at any particular time. They need also to re-evaluate their decisions frequently, in order to ensure that partnership with government, and government co-funding, are not causing them to be 'tamed' and acquiescent on key issues of justice.

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