

June 10, 2013

Congressman Ryan,

I wish to introduce myself. My name is Richard Coronado and I teach economics at Benedictine College. For the last ten years, I have been team teaching the course, TH/EC 370 Catholic Social Teaching, here at the college with a colleague, Dr. John Rziha, of the theology department.

I was at the May 11 graduation ceremony and heard your talk. I believe that most people took away from the talk the idea that we must care for the poor and the vulnerable among us and do something to improve their conditions. All that was very good to hear at such a ceremony and I am happy that you said it. I do agree with you that there is an “arc of prudential judgment” that we are responsible for navigating when we live our lives guided by the principles of Catholic social thought. However, I do believe that we must truly understand the principles as they are developed and understood within the tradition of Catholic social thought. It is that vein that I wish to take issue with you. The three areas that I will address are your points about greed, the Catholic view of freedom and subsidiarity.

Greed, Concupiscence, and Change of Lifestyles

When I heard you begin a discussion of “greed,” I thought back to a conversation I had many years ago with my parish priest in Weston, Missouri, near Atchison. He was a Jesuit, aged and wise, and we were talking about sin and how people come to sin. He believed that active decisions to sin, such as the decision to be greedy, did happen of course, but that was not the path to sin for most people. Rather, it was the simple urge to want to be comfortable, to make life easier for oneself and one’s family. Concupiscence, in a word. That simple impulse pursued day in and day out, over the course of a lifetime, he had learned, unless challenged constantly, resulted in people slowly sliding away from their spiritual life and neglecting their duties to others, in the neighborhood, civically – in the city, and so on. From Pope Leo XIII and *Rerum Novarum* onward (following the lead of the Fathers of the Church), the popes are uniform in their belief that we use our superfluous income and time to, in modern lingo, directly support the full development of the poor and vulnerable. When people slide into the pursuit of a life of comfort and ease, they are much less likely to see that they even have superfluous income or time on their hands, much less feel the “urgency” that Benedict sees in the poverty and “glaring inequalities”. I believe that it is more for reasons such as Father Waterman’s than out of sheer greed that Benedict believes “the distracted eye of society” does not notice the plight of exploited workers (64); he states that we often do not even notice actions of gratuity that occur before our very eyes because of the utilitarian and consumerist ideas which shape our view of life. (34)

This brings me directly to a point which you omitted completely in your talk but which is an essential element of Catholic social thought. This is the repeated call for a change of lifestyle. We are called, in a nutshell, to simplify our lives in order to allow God’s grace to enter our souls, so that as “the objects of God's love, men and women become subjects of charity, they are called to make themselves instruments of grace, so as to pour forth God's charity and to weave networks of charity.” (5) Remembering that the spiritual life is our active presence before God in every dimension of our lives, our style of life was raised by the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes*, the pastoral constitution on the church in the following way: “Different styles of life and multiple scales of values arise from the diverse manner of using things, of laboring, of expressing oneself, of practicing religion, of forming customs, of establishing laws and juridic institutions of cultivating the sciences, the arts and beauty. Thus the customs handed down to it form the patrimony proper to each human community.” (GS, 53) The context was their discussion of ensuring the right that everyone has to sufficient material goods for living of a good life. (69) Prior to this, in 1931, Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* had made clear the strict nature of the duty that each of us has to the poor and vulnerable in the style of life we choose: “Furthermore, a person's

superfluous income, that is, income which he does not need to sustain life fittingly and with dignity, is not left wholly to his own free determination. Rather the Sacred Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church constantly declare in the most explicit language that the rich are bound by a very grave precept to practice almsgiving, beneficence, and munificence.”(QA50)

John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus* develops the important distinction between having and being, concluding that having more is dangerous when it distracts us from “being more.”

It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards "having" rather than "being", and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself. It is therefore necessary to create life-styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments. In this regard, it is not a matter of the duty of charity alone, that is, the duty to give from one's "abundance", and sometimes even out of one's needs, in order to provide what is essential for the life of a poor person. I am referring to the fact that even the decision to invest in one place rather than another, in one productive sector rather than another, is always a moral and cultural choice. Given the utter necessity of certain economic conditions and of political stability, the decision to invest, that is, to offer people an opportunity to make good use of their own labour, is also determined by an attitude of human sympathy and trust in Providence, which reveal the human quality of the person making such decisions.(CA36)

John Paul is clear as well that doing what we are doing at present is simply not enough:

Love for others, and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice. Justice will never be fully attained unless people see in the poor person, who is asking for help in order to survive, not an annoyance or a burden, but an opportunity for showing kindness and a chance for greater enrichment. Only such an awareness can give the courage needed to face the risk and the change involved in every authentic attempt to come to the aid of another. It is not merely a matter of "giving from one's surplus", but of helping entire peoples which are presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development. For this to happen, it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of life-styles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies. Nor is it a matter of eliminating instruments of social organization which have proved useful, but rather of orienting them according to an adequate notion of the common good in relation to the whole human family. Today we are facing the so-called "globalization" of the economy, a phenomenon which is not to be dismissed, since it can create unusual opportunities for greater prosperity. (CA58)

It is essential for us to realize that we have the superfluous income and time, and to be motivated in all that we do by charity in order to be able to make a true gift of self. Remember that the goal is not simply helping someone out. The goal is communion and unity with all persons everywhere. As John Paul put it, we must become “fully aware of the urgent need to change the spiritual attitudes which define each individual's relationship with self, with neighbor, with even the remotest human communities, and with nature itself; and all of this in view of higher values such as the common good or, to quote the felicitous expression of the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, the full development ‘of the whole individual and of all people’”. (SRS38) Changing our lifestyles radically is an essential part of the message of Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict. If we can change our spiritual attitudes, we will be able to change our lifestyles and then be able to make the necessary changes to models of production and consumption and established structures of power.

It is not clear to me whether you meant to make the point that greed will be disarmed by the market, an argument that is often made by those of a libertarian perspective, but it seems clear that the market cannot

operate to offset the process described so well by Fr. Waterman. Rather, the market is likely to be the source of the goods that persons turn to in the pursuit of the life of comfort that Fr. Waterman described. Of course, the arc of prudential judgment you discussed in your talk must be at work in our process of discernment and decisions about how to live but it does appear that much more is expected of us than helping at the margin. Rather, we are called to true sacrifice, to change our lifestyles as a key part of our conversion experience. The advice of Mother Teresa is apt: She urged us to learn to look for need in the human family and then to find ways to fill that need. Only when we all learn to live in that way can charity become the driving force in the economy.

Freedom, Christian and Market

A second point I wish to make regards a most important distinction, that between the freedom of the marketplace and Catholic, or true, freedom. I did not see this distinction in your talk. The view of freedom that permeates Catholic social thought was given voice to by Leo XIII in his 1878 encyclical, *Libertas*, and subsequently used in *Rerum Novarum* and all succeeding encyclicals. As a Thomist, he voiced the view of freedom of St. Thomas Aquinas. Of course, it starts with our being created by God, in God's very own image. The person's connection with God is the most important one in life and the decision to turn to God and make a free gift of ourselves to God is the beginning of freedom. We are free as long as we remain free to do God's will, as we discern it in God's plan for us. We call this latter our vocation nowadays, and it is a central part of our vocation – one we share with everyone – to commit ourselves to the full development of everyone, in every dimension of life. This is the message of Paul VI, John Paul, and Benedict. Our freedom is directly linked with living a life of becoming closer to God, and to every person, because when we sin, either deliberately or by falling or sliding into structures of sin, we are no longer growing closer to God and others; we are no longer building unity and community, but disrupting it. We risk losing our freedom to do good by falling into sin and structures of sin. Catholic freedom is the freedom to grow in God's grace, to be able to see our true good and the true common good and to pursue that life by living a life of gratuity, or free gift of self.

The importance of freedom in the social encyclicals is attested to by John Paul in the 1991 *Centesimus Annus* as he reviews *Rerum Novarum*, written 100 years before, in 1891: "Indeed, what is the origin of all the evils to which *Rerum Novarum* wished to respond, if not a kind of freedom which, in the area of economic and social activity, cuts itself off from the truth about man?" Alienation is often the result when we act "freely", but not in the light of our true end. He finds alienation in the modern world in consumerism when "people are ensnared in a web of false and superficial gratifications rather than being helped to experience their personhood in an authentic and concrete way." He clearly intends to convey that although we may act freely by market standards, we find ourselves ensnared and hence not truly free; for John Paul, we become alienated in human terms, that is, unable to give the true gift of self. Alienation can also found also in work, "when it is organized so as to ensure maximum returns and profits with no concern whether the worker, through his own labour, grows or diminishes as a person, either through increased sharing in a genuinely supportive community or through increased isolation in a maze of relationships marked by destructive competitiveness and estrangement, in which he is considered only a means and not an end."(CA41)

As you are aware, in economics, the freedom of the marketplace does not have a self-limiting moral principle. We, as economists, rightly tout the market for its efficiency in meeting existing preferences, given the distribution of money income and wealth, that is, in meeting what John Paul calls solvent needs. We tout it for allocating resources – and here inequalities are required, in order to entice resource owners to offer their resources for the production of the goods most desired by society. John Paul agrees, up to certain point. He agrees that markets have vitally important positive features. In the midst of a discussion of a need to provide for defense and preservation of common goods, goods which by their nature cannot

be bought and sold, he praises the market in terms that any economist can appreciate, but ends with a stern warning:

“Certainly the mechanisms of the market offer secure advantages: they help to utilize resources better; they promote the exchange of products; above all they give central place to the person's desires and preferences, which, in a contract, meet the desires and preferences of another person. Nevertheless, these mechanisms carry the risk of an "idolatry" of the market, an idolatry which ignores the existence of goods which by their nature are not and cannot be mere commodities” (CA40).

The point he is making is that the market can be every bit an occasion for us not using our freedom to meet our final end of loving God and others as any other institution or means we can devise, including a government that oversteps its bounds and violates our basic natural rights. In fact, Benedict is convinced that what he terms the logic of the market and the logic of the state, which respectively result in our giving to acquire and giving out of duty is corrosive of society because it leads us to neglect the main way in which we should be using our freedom. All too often we are distracted by a consumerist and utilitarian view of life by the first logic and coerced by the second, to the detriment of the use of our freedom to practice gratuity in all dimensions of our life.

Only a life of grace and a commitment to avoid such everyday evils as concupiscence and other structures of sin (see John Paul II SRS, 1987) in our life-styles can support us in our vocation to solve the social question. Hence the commitment to change our life-styles, our models of production and consumption, and established structures of power is not an add-on, but a central part of Catholic social teaching. This gratuity, or gratuitousness, that prompts and underlies the change of lifestyles is the free gift of self to which John Paul urged us, of giving without counting the cost, of an unexpected but most welcomed gift (34), of the love that happens among members of a family (often called *fraternity* in the document). Benedict urges us, thus empowered and emboldened, to bring this sense of gratuitousness into all aspects of life, especially including normal economic activity, for the economy is a sector of human activity (36,4;45,2; see 36,3). He states clearly:

What is needed, therefore, is a market that permits the free operation, in conditions of equal opportunity, of enterprises in pursuit of different institutional ends. Alongside profit-oriented private enterprise and the various types of public enterprise, there must be room for commercial entities based on mutualist principles and pursuing social ends to take root and express themselves. It is from their reciprocal encounter in the marketplace that one may expect hybrid forms of commercial behavior to emerge, and hence an attentiveness to ways of *civilizing the economy*. Charity in truth, in this case, requires that shape and structure be given to those types of economic initiative which, without rejecting profit, aim at a higher goal than the mere logic of the exchange of equivalents, of profit as an end in itself (38).

He believes, then, that the primary use of our freedom is to support our final end, knowing and loving God and others, in which we offer the free gift of ourselves to God and to others. The results of such a gift are communion and unity, even in the seemingly more mundane activities of everyday economic life. Our freedom is not to be invested in such ideologies as the technical one, but in the living reality of God's love, which we are then to take into every dimension of our lives. The popes hope that the result will be a “a model of market economy capable of including within its range all peoples and not just the better off.” (39) *Rerum Novarum's* model of calling on the state for purposes of redistribution is now inadequate. (39)

Subsidiarity

I also wish to make a point or two on your use of subsidiarity as a political principle. You state: “Subsidiarity is like federalism” and point out that government must do some things but cannot do all things. You are referring; I take it, in the federalism comment to the relationship between the federal and state governments in our country, with each sovereign in its own domain. The principle of subsidiarity is certainly a bedrock principle of Catholic social thought. Pope Benedict rightly calls it “an expression of inalienable human freedom” since individuals and intermediate groups must exercise their natural rights and duties in their respective realms if society is to be properly ordered. (57) For example, the head of a family is responsible for earning a living and supporting the family and must be free to fulfill that duty. There is a common good, as you point out, and social justice requires both that the person fulfill the duty to support the family and that he have the opportunity to do so. That opportunity should be provided at the lowest social level possible, presumably at the level of labor markets, especially regarding the firms or companies that might hire this person. A major problem arises in times such as the present when three and a half persons are in the job market for every one job available because the issue of employment cannot be readily settled at the lowest level possible. All social encyclicals, therefore, call for social programs such as unemployment compensation and family assistance programs to help support families in such times.

Subsidiarity in the political sense, as you used it, is most often used to draw lines between realms of rights and duties among the levels of the social or political groupings, though in some extreme cases, the federal government may intrude on the realm of the state government. My point is that the concept is often used as a limiting principle between the extent of duties between and among political entities. Benedict, however, is very clear that the use of the concept of subsidiarity in Catholic social thought does not allow us to delineate where our duties to each other end, as the principle of political subsidiarity might imply. In the example above, it is not acceptable simply to state that subsidiarity requires that the lowest social group possible must solve the problem and leave it at that. In identifying subsidiarity as a “particular manifestation of charity and a guiding criterion for fraternal cooperation between believers and non-believers,” he points to subsidiarity as the means for correctly identifying how to properly exercise solidarity with others. (57) Traditionally, in Catholic social teaching, when the lower social groups cannot or will not solve a social issue or problem, the duty to do so falls to the higher social or political entity. Hence the call, as noted above, for unemployment compensation and family assistance programs, which are usually dealt with jointly by the state and federal governments.

Benedict, however, explicitly calls on us to expand the realm of duties and responsibilities to support the full development of all – including finding a job, as in the example above – to every person, whether in our individual or intermediate group action, or in our political participation – into every human activity. This is a form of charity, perhaps it should be called a radical form of charity, which insists that as Christians we are called to be a free gift of self to others – to use Pope John Paul’s term – and only in this way can the social question begin to be resolved. Benedict is not reluctant to point to the urgency of this call, which he believes stems from the “great problems of injustice in the development of peoples”, “but also from the very matter that is at stake: the establishment of authentic fraternity.”(20) For example, he calls on consumers to exercise their power to help alleviate the conditions of exploited workers and the marginalized, on investors to invest in companies that provide goods that provide basic needs and employment at dignity wages, and he calls on government to open the process of assistance and support to fraternal love. Subsidiarity, therefore, is the tool that we need for discerning the best way in which we must exercise the prudential judgment of how to support others, not whether to do so or not.

Conclusion

I wish to close this letter with two points. The first is that the weight that Pope Benedict attached to the importance of the radical charity to which he called us may be measured by the weight he attaches to Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio*. Benedict believes that PP simply unfolds ideas that were present in the

earlier encyclicals, but it is certainly true that Paul's way of formulating the social question presents us with a more comprehensive set of duties in supporting the common good, or as John Paul describes it, quoting Paul VI, "the full development 'of the whole individual and of all people'" (SRS38). It was Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* who insisted that all other rights must be subordinated to the principle of the universal destination of goods. This is what he says:

All other rights, whatever they may be, including the rights of property and free trade, are to be subordinated to this principle. They should in no way hinder it; in fact, they should actively facilitate its implementation. Redirecting these rights back to their original purpose must be regarded as an important and urgent social duty. (PP22)

Note that Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict are talking about the full development of everyone, individual persons and peoples, not about average standards of living, and recall that Benedict adds the note of urgency to the matter.

The second point I wish to close on focuses on Benedict's belief that without gratuitousness governing all dimensions of our lives, justice itself will be impossible to attain. Here is the way I put it in a 2011 paper on *Caritas in Veritate*:

Benedict makes a point fundamental to the reading of *Caritas in veritate* in the following statement: "While in the past it was possible to argue that justice had to come first and gratuitousness could follow afterwards, as a complement, today it is clear that without gratuitousness, there can be no justice in the first place." (CV38) The free gift of self in all our relationships, in all the dimensions in which we live our lives, is not an optional matter if we are to obtain justice. Rather, Benedict teaches that it is required if we are to have any hope of obtaining justice. He makes the argument throughout the course of the encyclical; and here we may review his reasons for this belief. Unless we are living deeply enough out of the love of the Holy Spirit, based on our faith, unless we are open to grace, unless we mobilize ourselves at the level of the heart, we are unable to see our proper role in the culture, politics, economics, and social life around us. Our intellect is darkened – darkened reason, in his words – and is no longer able to guide us in the proper way to act in the world (36,2). This inability to see is especially true amid the dysfunctions, injustices, and ideologies he describes as characteristics of the current economic processes associated with globalization. With consciences no longer attuned to the needs of the common good, reason alone is unable to guide us toward our proper path. Further, with a will not animated by charity, we lack the courage to act on behalf of social justice. Benedict believes that reason and will must act together, and hence we need charity in truth, *caritas in veritate*, infused into all aspects of our lives. This would dispel ideologies and allow a clearer vision of the unity to which we are called. Finally and importantly, it would lead us to the ongoing source that is God's love, essential to animate us to act for social justice. (Coronado107)

Only charity, God's love for us in the spirit, is capable of sustaining us in the effort for a lifetime. And there is work enough for a lifetime. We are to use our freedom to create, in the words of Pope Paul VI, "truly human conditions." He states:

What are truly human conditions? They are the rise from poverty to the acquisition of life's necessities, the elimination of social ills, broadening the horizons of knowledge, acquiring refinement and culture. From there one can go on to acquire a growing awareness of other people's dignity, a taste for the spirit of poverty, (18) an active interest in the common good, and a desire for peace. Then man can acknowledge the highest values and God Himself, their author and end. Finally and above all, there is faith—God's gift to men of good will—and our loving unity in Christ, who calls all men to share God's life as sons of the living God, the Father of all men. (PP21)

Our task is to humanize all human institutions, whether political, social, economic, or cultural, infusing them with the spirit of gift, of gratuity, of the free gift of self. For this is, as Benedict sees it, the worthiest use of human freedom and our only hope of resolving the social question. We can see clearly in the approaches of the popes, perhaps especially in Benedict's approach, that since Catholic social teaching is essentially a spiritual phenomenon, we have to pay special attention to the movement of our spiritual life in the entirety of our lives.

Catholic social teaching aims at unity and peace among the human family, and we are called to establish true community, including in "the numerous intermediary bodies and corporate enterprises", which are to "treat their individual members as human persons and encourage them to take an active part in the ordering of their lives." (65) Benedict's call for unity requires that all business enterprises, in the movement toward becoming true communities, become open to the spirit of gratuity, that is, become open to the spirit of the free gift of self, without which the social question is incapable of solution. As noted above, this is behind Benedict's call for "hybrid" enterprises, which aim for profit, like standard enterprises, but to be put to use for social purposes. In fact, all enterprises – whether profit oriented or ruled by mutual principles, indeed all communities, must be open to the spirit of gift, that is, of gratuity, or the free gift of self. (38) I have developed this elsewhere, but a spiritual program for everyday life that emerges from *Caritas in Veritate* involves three movements of the spirit. (Coronado100-105) There is the movement from isolation to communion with others, the movement from the way of self-sufficiency to that of solidarity with others, and the movement from ideology and illusion to the reality of living God's plan for us in charity and truth.

Sincerely yours,

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