

ACTION FOR JUSTICE AS CONSTITUTIVE OF THE
PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL: WHAT DID THE 1971 SYNOD
MEAN?

There has been within the past century a notable growth and development in an area of church life which has come to be known as her "social teaching." It began ninety years ago with Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum*, in which the Church took up the question of the rights of workers; it took a new turn with John XXIII's *Mater et magistra* and the conciliar and postconciliar documents, most notably *Gaudium et spes* and Paul VI's *Populorum progressio*, when the Church's teaching reflected a far broader and more global perspective than merely workers' rights.¹

A milestone in this rapidly developing area of the Church's concern and mission, by common consent, was the document *Justice in the World* which emerged from the second ordinary World Synod of Bishops held in the fall of 1971. It is in this document that for the first time in a magisterial statement of the Church the biblical concept of liberation appears.² The document's discussion of the personal right of social participation and the right to development conceived as the "dynamic integration of all fundamental human rights" has been called "the beginning of a new phase of the tradition—a phase which presumes that personal freedom is simultaneously both inescapably social and intrinsically dependent on developing social structures."³ What has been called the principal insight of the 1971 synod, the most notable development to date in the history of modern social teaching, is the following sentence from that document: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."

We are obviously in an area where theological reflection is needed upon a vital and ongoing dimension of the Church's contemporary life. In this article, ten years after the synod, I will examine whether and to what extent the term "constitutive" employed by the synod clarifies the spiritual and religious basis of the Church's commitment to social justice, to human solidarity and emancipation. The sources I will draw upon are the interpretations of the synod's work provided by the principal drafters

¹ Pope John Paul II, in the apostolic exhortation *Laborem exercens* (1981) 2, calls attention to this shift.

² Cf. René Laurentin, *Réorientation de l'église après le troisième Synode* (Paris: Seuil, 1972) 167-73.

³ David Hollenbach, S.J., *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 94.

of the document, supplemented by material from the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace and the rather complete summary of each synod's proceedings edited by Giovanni Caprile.⁴

The term "constitutive" is a strong, arresting term. It forces the Christian to ask the vital question whether working for justice is at the heart of the Church's mission and of the gospel itself, that is, part of the very definition of Christianity, or whether working for justice is more on the level of an ethical deduction from the central truths of the Christian message. The term "constitutive" confronts us with this central question for our times; as such, its theological analysis is of the greatest importance, not merely in terms of history or theory but in terms of the ongoing life of the Church and the direction she will be taking. Indeed, this sentence from the synod has been used in the United States, in Latin America, in Africa, and elsewhere as the platform and the legitimation for a whole series of new initiatives in social and political life by Roman Catholics.⁵

Some see in these new directions of involvement a loss of the Christian identity and a compromise of the gospel itself. Obviously, I cannot offer answers to all these questions, which are still very contemporary in the life of the Church, but perhaps some light will be cast by an analysis of how accurately the term "constitutive" represents the Church tradition thus far and even carries it forward. I will (1) begin with a description of the evolution of *Justice in the World* in the synod of 1971, (2) discuss its "correction" in the synod of 1974 and the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* which followed it, and (3) assess the impact of the term "constitutive" on the life of the Church and the various interpretations it has received. In this last section I will attempt to supply some of the needed theological background for a fuller statement of the centrality of justice and love in the preaching of the gospel and the life of the Church.

THE SYNOD OF 1971

The synod of 1971 was the third synod since this phenomenon emerged in the contemporary Church. The synod was still at this point striving to discover its identity apart from, for example, the identity of an ecumenical council. An ecumenical council usually meets over several years, and there is the opportunity to reflect at length with wide consultation on the topics presented. A synod, however, meets for a very short period, is consultative in nature, and more recently has relieved itself of the burden of coming up with a document at the end of its sessions,

⁴ *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi, 1971, Parte Seconda* (Rome: La Civiltà Cattolica, 1972), and *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi, 1974* (Rome: La Civiltà Cattolica, 1975).

⁵ See, e.g., the mission statements adopted by the Society of Jesus and the Maryknoll fathers and brothers respectively in 1975 and 1978.

preferring to give its work to the pope for further disposition. The synod of 1971 was the last to produce a full document; in fact, it produced two, corresponding to the two topics it was given to discuss: the ministerial priesthood and justice in the world.

Between October 19 and 30, during eleven "general congregations" and four days of sessions by twelve smaller study groups, the synod took up the question of justice. This was after three exhausting weeks of discussion concerning the ministerial priesthood, discussion which continued even while the synod began its deliberations about justice. On October 31 and November 1 and 2, the drafting group produced the justice statement. On November 3, the *textus prior* was presented to the full synod. Voting on this first draft, by section only, took place the next day. On November 5, the *textus emendatus* was distributed and voting on this text followed on November 6.

The head of the drafting committee, who was also the special secretary of the synod for the theme of justice, was Bishop Ramón Torella Cascante, former auxiliary bishop in Barcelona, and the new vice president of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace. The sole official theologian of the synod regarding justice was Juan Alfaro, S.J., of the Gregorian University, the principal author of the eventual chapter 2, "The Gospel Message and the Mission of the Church."

Bishop Torrella proposed to the three cardinal presidents of the synod that before the intervention of the synod fathers, three lay experts be allowed to address the full assembly. The economist Barbara Ward spoke on "Planetary Justice," Candido Mendez of the University of Rio de Janeiro addressed the topic "Development and Structural Marginalization," and Kinhide Mushakoji, a Japanese expert on disarmament, gave an intervention on "The Universal Aspiration to Participation." The ideas all three expressed had considerable impact and found their way into the eventual final text. Two other members of the drafting committee were Philip Land, S.J., of the staff in Rome of the commission, and Vincent Cosmao, O.P., a member of the commission who came to Rome for the duration of the synod from Paris, where he was, and still is, associated with the Centre Foie et Développement founded by Louis Lebret. The principal author of the Introduction, in which the sentence under discussion appears, was Cosmao. The synod made two alterations in the sentence: the word "action" (*actio*) for justice replaced "struggle" (*pugna*), and "redemption" was added as a more traditional term to balance the newer term "liberation" and to avoid the danger of excessive "horizontalism." Horizontalism came up several times in criticism of the document from its earliest stages of development; it refers to the danger of reducing the gospel to a merely human project and a purely temporal goal.

The crucial word "constitutive" passed without comment or debate.

The official Latin version reads "dimensio constitutiva," which is a translation of Cosmao's original French text "une dimension constitutive." The English translation is "a constitutive dimension"; the Spanish also uses the equivalent "una" but the Italian reads "la dimensione costitutiva." The Dutch and German translations use the word "essential" and not "constitutive." These latter versions would cause some difficulty in the synod of 1974.

In Cosmao's explanation of the meaning of the term "constitutive," the preaching of the gospel "occurs" by means of the action on behalf of justice: the gospel itself, taken against its Old Testament background, is the proclamation of the intervention of God for the realization of justice. The word "constitutive" was used, therefore, to make engagement for justice not merely an ethical deduction from faith but a very condition for the truth of the faith.⁶ In a speech given to the French hierarchy prior to the synod, Cosmao used the same phrasing as he employed in his draft for the synod to describe the relationship between action for justice and the preaching of the gospel. "Is the participation in the transformation of the world, perceived as unjust, merely a requirement flowing from the faith and expressing itself in the works of charity, or is it constitutive of Christ's passover conceived as coextensive with human history, which is the history of human liberation"?"⁷

In *Octogesima adveniens*, issued just before the synod, Pope Paul VI expressed the hope that the synod would be able to provide assistance by studying the mission of the Church with regard to justice questions. The document produced by the synod was very consistent in its development with the process for approaching these questions laid down by *Octogesima adveniens*: analysis of the social situation; reflection upon the gospel teaching in the light of the situation; judgment and action. But as the synod of 1974 opened, Paul VI stated that it was necessary that there be a "better and more subtle" definition of the relationship of evangelization as such and human striving toward progress. In the years following the synod of 1971, Pope Paul on several occasions made favorable reference to *Justice in the World* but never the passage which refers to action on behalf of justice as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel.⁸

⁶ Letter to the author, Paris, Dec. 18, 1980. See also two of his writings after the synod: his book *Changer le monde: Une tâche pour l'église* (Paris: Cerf, 1980), and the article "Changer le monde," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 101 (1979) 24-38.

⁷ "Justice dans le monde? Théologie sous-jacente au document du travail du Synode épiscopale," *Documentation catholique*, no. 1589 (July 4, 1971) 639.

⁸ John Paul II, however, has quoted this sentence on at least two occasions. Speaking to the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla in 1979, he cited it but used the word "indispensable" instead of "constitutive." In his address on Feb. 27, 1982, to the provincials of the Society of Jesus, he stated that the Church considers the promotion of justice as an "integral part" of evangelization (*Osservatore romano*, Feb. 28, 1982, 3).

THE SYNOD OF 1974

The term "constitutive" began to receive critical examination in the next general assembly, the synod of 1974, which was devoted to one theme, "Evangelization of the World in our Times." It was a theme which grew out of the discussions of the previous synod and laid emphasis on the religious mission of the Church. The most significant result of the 1974 synod was Pope Paul's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, which received a wide and favorable response in the Church and contributed further clarification about the relationship between the gospel and justice. It has become a foundational document in all subsequent discussion in this area.

In February prior to the opening of the synod, the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace issued a document as its own "contribution" to the work of the synod. The *raison d'être* of the document, *Evangelization of the Modern World*, was given by Bishop Torrella in his Introduction: "It is very important that on the occasion of the coming synod action for justice and peace be reasserted in the perspective of evangelization and as one of its integral parts. Naturally, ambiguities, misunderstandings, contradictions, and confusion should be avoided."

It is apparent that some of the "ambiguities, misunderstandings, contradictions, and confusion" centered around the term "constitutive"; for Bishop Torrella goes on:

The last synod clearly stated that action for justice . . . is a "constitutive dimension" and not a "unique dimension," as if the entire evangelization should be carried out exclusively through action for justice. But it is true that modern man is very sensitive to the values of justice, peace, and solidary love. It is a question of the credibility of the announcement of the message of salvation. It is very important to make the relation and link between evangelization and peace explicit. There can be no peace without justice, no justice without peace.⁹

It is already clear in these words of Torrella that some corrective interpretation was beginning to take place.

Torrella was still the vice president of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace at the time of the 1974 synod and was appointed to participate in it by the pope. His contribution to the document *Justice in the World* had been so large and significant that his interpretation of that document, and especially of the phrase "constitutive dimension," is of the greatest significance. Before the synod opened, Torrella gave an interview in which he expressed thoughts he would repeat during the course of the synod.¹⁰ The occasion for the interview was the publication

⁹ *Evangelization of the Modern World*, "Contribution of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace to the Synod of 1974," Feb. 1974 (Archives of the Commission) 1.

¹⁰ *Avenir*, Sept. 18, 1974. The interview was written by Silvano Stracca.

of his commission's "contribution" to the work of the synod, mentioned above. He summarized that document by saying that it is important for the synod to reaffirm the necessity of action on behalf of peace and justice within the perspective of evangelization and as an integral part of evangelization. The phrase "integral part" is important because it would be used during the synod as Torrella's explanation of what the synod of 1971 meant by the term "constitutive dimension." The Italian version of the 1971 document on justice spoke of "la dimensione costitutiva." In the interview Torrella corrected this translation: the synod meant that working for justice is but one, and only one, dimension of the preaching of the gospel. After some words about the difficulty of the gospel message acquiring credibility in the world today without the witness of action for peace and justice, Torrella asserted that the dual dangers of dichotomy and identification must be avoided.

Bishop Torrella made two interventions in the course of the synod itself. The first, on October 12, was in three parts: Justice and Evangelization; The Credibility of the Gospel Today; Challenge to Our Faith. In this intervention Torrella sought to avoid the "fatal dualism" between faith and justice of which he had spoken in his interview. He called for the present synod to provide "integration" and "synthesis" for pastoral action. His second intervention, on October 17, was made, he said, to avoid unnecessary polemics, because he had seen among the questions given to the study groups one asking for a justification of "constitutive" from the previous synod. After noting the overwhelming positive vote the whole Introduction had received with only two small emendations, he affirmed that the "mind of the synodal fathers" was that "constitutive dimension" meant "integral part," referring to the second chapter of the document regarding the love of God being made efficacious and manifest in the love of neighbor. He then explicitly stated that "essential" was not the meaning given by the synod to the word "constitutive," or at least that such could not be proven. For Torrella, constitutive defined as integral part is not so strong a term as essential; it refers to "something which accompanies, but need not be present, that is, strictly speaking, a true proclamation of the gospel could take place without action for justice."¹¹

Both Land and Alfaro, however, expressed reservations about Torrella's clarifications concerning the intent of the synod. Land believes that interpreting "constitutive" as "integral" weakens the meaning of the word and confuses the issue. "If you say something is an integral part, it could be either a substantial part or an accidental part. No one wanted to say that justice is an accidental part of the gospel."¹² Alfaro saw in

¹¹ Conversations with the author, fall of 1980, Rome.

¹² Conversation with the author, Nov. 12, 1980, at the Center of Concern, Washington, D.C.

the 1974 synod an attempt to weaken the thrust of the 1971 synod. He believes that Torrella introduced an "unnecessary complication" in his intervention by trying to make "constitutive part" the equivalent of "integral part." Constitutive elements and integral elements are not the same, according to Alfaro. The body and soul, for example, are constitutive elements of man and woman, without which they could not exist. To assert, therefore, that in the Introduction to *Justice in the World* "constitutive" means "integral" is, according to Alfaro, "an error." "This was not the thinking of the drafting group. It is to introduce another term altogether."

Alfaro believes that the use of the scholastic term "constitutive" was unfortunate. Christianity, he maintains, as a historical reality cannot be expressed easily in such philosophical language. It would be better to use another type of vocabulary and say that in the proclamation of the gospel we cannot forget the proclamation of justice and the duty to practice justice. This at least, according to Alfaro, was the sense of the drafting group, who worked in a rather "spontaneous" atmosphere and used Cosmao's term "constitutive" not in a strict scholastic sense but in a much broader way. "Constitutive" means, for Alfaro, that justice is an essential aspect of the gospel, but not unique. Using the biblical language he prefers, Alfaro stresses that love of God and love of neighbor cannot be separated and that justice is the first requirement of love of neighbor, just as love in the Christian scheme is the motivation for justice.¹³

The "working paper" (*instrumentum laboris*) sent out prior to the opening of the 1974 synod attempted its own explanation of what the previous synod had meant to say and what it left unsaid. The working paper was in two parts: a summary of the experiences communicated by the various episcopal conferences, and a theological reflection. Part 1 noted "the intimate connection" between the work of human promotion and the Christian faith as taught by the previous synod, but asked how this work of human promotion should be carried out without losing Christian identity. Part 2 mentioned that nearly all the responses of the episcopal conferences affirmed the intrinsic connection between witness of life and evangelization ("intrinsicus ad rationem evangelizationis pertinere") as bearing upon the efficaciousness and credibility of the preaching, a witness of life especially through charity providing an experiential illustration and confirmatory sign of the truth of the gospel.

¹³ Interview, Feb. 1981, Rome. Alfaro's booklet issued just after the synod, *Theology of Justice in the World*, omits any mention of "constitutive" in explaining the teaching of the synod (Vatican City: Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, 1973). For a fuller exposition of Alfaro's views, see *Christian Hope and Liberation of Man* (Rome and Sydney: Dwyer, 1978).

According to the *instrumentum laboris*, therefore, the connection which the synod of 1971 affirmed between gospel preaching and the work of justice is one of credibility.

The "greater precision," however, about the "intimate link" between preaching the gospel and the work of justice which Pope Paul insistently called for had to await the publication of his own *Evangelii nuntiandi* one year after the synod's close.

THE APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION "EVANGELII NUNTIANDI"

In the first of the seven sections of the exhortation, Pope Paul focuses everything upon the person of Christ, who is himself the Good News, who comes to proclaim above all else the kingdom of God and His salvation. This salvation, "this great gift of God," is liberation from everything that oppresses man and woman but is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One.¹⁴ The Church is born of the evangelizing activity of Jesus and exists in order to evangelize: this is her "deepest identity," "the grace and vocation proper to her." Paul therefore states that "It is with joy and consolation that at the end of the great assembly of 1974 we heard these illuminating words: 'We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church.'"¹⁵

Sections 2, 3, and 4, which are concerned with the definition, content, and methods of evangelization, are the most important to our discussion. Paul defines evangelization much more broadly than proclaiming Christ to those who do not know him, preaching, catechesis, and conferring baptism and other sacraments. It is "a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative."¹⁶ Section 3 wishes to define the primary and secondary elements within the complex process of evangelization. The foundation, center, and summit of evangelization, its essential content, is the proclamation of God, revealed by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, His love for the world and His offer of salvation. Secondary elements of evangelization—without which, however, evangelization would not be "complete"—are the rights and duties of every human being, family life, life in society, international life, peace, justice and development—in other words, all the gospel has to say about concrete human life, both personal and social.

The Pope then distinguishes the divine message of eternal salvation from the pastoral concern for human advancement expressed, he says,

¹⁴ Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World: The Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii nuntiandi"* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1976) no. 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 24.

during the synod, especially by bishops of the Third World. The salvation offered through evangelization is the gift of God's grace and mercy, not an immanent salvation meeting material or even spiritual needs restricted to the framework of temporal existence and completely identified with temporal desires, hopes, affairs, and struggles. "Consequently," the exhortation continues, "evangelization cannot but include the prophetic proclamation of a hereafter, man's profound and definitive calling, in both continuity and discontinuity with the present situation: beyond time and history."¹⁷ Pastoral concern, however, for the concrete situations of the persons and societies to be evangelized is entirely proper; for "between evangelization and human advancement—development and liberation—there are profound links." These links are of the anthropological, theological, and evangelical orders: "anthropological, because the man who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions; theological, since one cannot disassociate the plan of creation from the plan of redemption which applies to very concrete situations of injustice; evangelical, which refers to charity and the justice included in it."¹⁸

Although it was in the form of an "exhortation" and "meditation," *Evangelii nuntiandi* in this way attempted to throw additional light on a complex and subtle relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

The document *Justice in the World* is easily the most reprinted publication issued by the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, and the sentence most quoted from it is far and away the one we have been discussing. This fact already provides, apart from further analysis, a hermeneutic upon the word.

Cosmao, in his significant letter to me regarding his role in drafting the document, noted the powerful impact *Justice in the World* and the word "constitutive" in particular have had in developing countries. He wrote: "I have been immediately struck most of all by the fact that the militant Churches in the Third World have recognized themselves in this phrase of the synod, which, it seems to me, once it was adopted, became a key phrase of the pontificate of Pope Paul VI."¹⁹ Walbert Buhlmann, in his widely read book *The Coming of the Third Church*, confirms this appraisal by Cosmao regarding the strong resonance the *Justice* document achieved in Third World countries.²⁰ The bishops from the Third World, as we have seen, frequently alluded to it in the synod of 1974.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 31.

¹⁹ Letter of Dec. 18, 1980.

²⁰ Cf. Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church* (Slough, Eng.: St. Paul Publications, 1976) 100, 103, 107, 114 ff.

But the most significant contribution which the term "constitutive" has made to the life of the Church, according to Cosmao, is the remarkable reversal of perspective that took place within a period of twenty years. The Church entered the justice field originally by attempting to alleviate world hunger, acting out of a motive of charity, but then began to grasp that "her participation in the transformation of the world order is the very condition of the truth of her faith and of the relevance and meaning of the gospel she announces." This reversal of perspective was made with the justice text of the 1971 synod, so that it was a kind of pivot which has not ceased to produce its effects.²¹

The expression that working for justice is "constitutive" of the preaching of the gospel can be seen as an outgrowth of trends in earlier Church teaching. In Vatican II's pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*, and continuing with Pope Paul's encyclical *Populorum progressio*, the Church's involvement in the question of justice was explained not only within a framework of the natural law but more centrally from the gospel itself. We can see that the assertion we are examining from *Justice in the World* is closely allied with this evolution. *Gaudium et spes* also sought to avoid dichotomies such as church and state, speaking rather of the Church *in* the world as a participant in the struggles of mankind, sharing a common history and, by reading the signs of the times, joining with others in the search for a common solution to human problems. The Church as a people of God and a community of believers, and the intimate relationship between justice and love in Christianity, which was stressed by *Gaudium et spes*, were picked up by the Second General Assembly of the Bishops of Latin America, held at Medellín in 1968, and led quite easily to the statement made in the synod of 1971.

Although the term "constitutive" to describe the relationship of the preaching of the gospel and the work of justice is a new one, certain equivalent or approximate theological expressions from other sources can be found. Vatican II's Decree on the Laity spoke about the "saturation and perfection of the temporal sphere by the spirit of the gospel."²² The *instrumentum laboris* of the 1974 synod referred to the "intrinsic connection between witness of life and evangelization" in terms of the efficaciousness and credibility of preaching.

The classical philosophical definition of "constitutive" is that which causes a thing to stand (the Latin roots are *cum* and *statuo*); it is that which is most fundamental and pertains to the very definition of a being, making it to be what it is. Thus Aquinas says that "filiation" is constitutive of the person of the Son in the Trinity, and rationality is said to

²¹ Vincent Cosmao, *Changer le monde* 104-5.

²² *Apostolicam actuositatem* 2.

be the “constitutive difference” of the human person.²³ “Essential” would not be an unacceptable equivalent, but “indispensable” would not seem to be adequate to communicate the force of the word.

Some, however, like Bishop Torrella, have claimed that the authentic interpretation of the word “constitutive” is “integral” and reject “essential” as too strong. Both the advocates of “essential” and of “integral” wish to stress the internal relationship between the gospel and justice, so that working for justice is not merely an ethical conclusion but pertains to the gospel itself. That internal relationship for some, however, is better expressed by “integral” because working for justice is more on the level of the credibility of the gospel in the circumstances of today than of its very essence. Neither interpretation wishes to leave the impression that justice is a mere optional aspect of the gospel, but the advocates of “integral” wish to avoid merging the divine and human contributions into one reality without keeping the proper distinctions and also to avoid the danger of reducing the mission of the Church to a “simply temporal project” and a “man-centered goal,” to use the terminology of *Evangelii nuntiandi*.²⁴ Alfaro, on the other hand, stresses as necessary the human response to the gospel message and, operating out of a more biblical conception of what God’s specific justice is and requires, defines constitutive as essential. Both meanings pick up nuances of the Church’s teaching on this subtle but important point.

The heart of the ambiguity about the meaning of constitutive, therefore, seems to reside in differing conceptions of what kind of justice is being referred to. If justice is conceived exclusively on the plane of the natural, human virtue of justice as explained in classical philosophical treatises,²⁵ then such justice can only be conceived as an integral but nonessential part of the preaching of the gospel. But if justice is conceived in the biblical sense of God’s liberating action which demands a necessary human response—a concept of justice which is far closer to agape than to justice in the classical philosophical sense—then justice must be defined as of the essence of the gospel itself. The latter sense seems to reflect better the mentality of more recent Christian social doctrine.

A decided shift took place in magisterial teaching regarding justice from John XXIII’s *Mater et magistra* onward: the previous conception of an organicity through reason was placed alongside a more biblical-

²³ *Index Thomisticus*, Sectio 2, Concordantia prima, Vol. 5, 378.

²⁴ The International Theological Commission’s document “Human Development and Christian Salvation,” issued in 1972, accepts “integral part” as the correct interpretation rather than “essential” because, while stressing the harmony between eschatological salvation and the human effort to build a better world, it keeps clear the distinction between the two. Cf. *Origins* 7, no. 20 (Nov. 3, 1977) 31.

²⁵ See, e.g., John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1971).

imaginative perspective on justice. It is within this new context that *Justice in the World* must be understood.²⁶

But justice and love may be endorsed and accepted, as the past and present experience of the Church has shown, in a very otherworldly way, that is, without the inclusion within it of what is called the natural, human virtue of justice. A biblical understanding of justice is a corrective to this. *Evangelii nuntiandi* was operating within a similar unifying perspective when it spoke of the profound links between evangelization and human progress; like the Scriptures, it was presenting a single vision uniting body and soul, creation and redemption, justice and charity. This unifying, nondualistic vision of the Christian life, we know, lay behind the use of the term "constitutive."

Both Alfaro's and Torrella's definitions can be squared with the teaching contained in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, but Cosmao's is not so easily reconcilable. Cosmao believes that the preaching of the gospel occurs by means of action for justice; for him, the debate between evangelization "or" development is sterile and there can be no subordination of the one to the other. Cosmao's original draft spoke of "struggle" (*le combat*) for justice, and ten years after the synod he continues to cite the passage in his original wording. "Struggle" seems at odds with the biblical conception we have been describing of justice arising out of love, and with the general conception of *Evangelii nuntiandi*. Cosmao obviously believes that *le combat* is closer to the original intention of the term "constitutive," which was to ground the central religious value of justice in the actual everyday history of the world.²⁷

The same division of opinion prevails concerning the necessity of action for justice as part of the "credibility" of the gospel preaching. Some will sharply distinguish the basic credibility of the gospel from the life of the Church, asserting that the principal sign of credibility is not the Church but Christ. Others question whether anyone could in practice accept the gospel without experience of the truth of Christian faith in the lives of the very persons proclaiming it.

The theological issues that lie behind "constitutive" are many and complex, but they ultimately converge on the question of the divine and human contributions in the economy of salvation, or, putting it in more contemporary language, "the relationship between the Christian proclamation of salvation and the emancipatory movements of our day."²⁸ Here

²⁶ See Marie Dominique Chenu, *La dottrina sociale della Chiesa: Origine e sviluppo, 1801-1971* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1977) esp. 52-53, and also the more nuanced view of Roger Heckel, *General Aspects of the Social Catechesis of John Paul II* (Vatican City: Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, 1980) 16-18.

²⁷ *Changer le monde* 12, 104-5.

²⁸ Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Christology after Vatican II," *Ecumenist* 18 (1980) 88.

we are presented with what everyone calls an "insoluble problem."²⁹ The best method of approach, if not of solution, lies in the indicative/imperative modality of biblical ethics and in the vocabulary of "gift and task" employed by H. Richard Niebuhr and Walter Kasper.³⁰ The "indicative" is who God is and what God has done and is doing. The "imperative" is the conformity of human action to God's action. The human response is the sign and the mediation of the divine activity but does not exhaust the potentialities of God's activity. The divine significance of human activity constitutes the meaning of human history. God's grace comes first and last in that history, but the "middle" which is the human response is indispensable as the necessary response to the divine initiative.³¹

Thus the human contribution has an essential role to play in the divine "economy," the timetable based upon God's own appointed times rather than on earthly days and years. The divine economy as it unfolds includes as part of itself the human response and even lack of response, and the result is new and sometimes different initiatives on the part of God. The human response, itself the result of divine grace, is taken up into the single divine plan which is the "economy."

Preserving the divine initiative lies behind the frequent appeal by Paul VI and John Paul II to safeguard the "originality" of the Christian message by not attempting to reduce it to a human plan of action. As Paul VI said in his closing speech to the 1974 synod, anticipating what he would write in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, the "totality" of salvation is not to be confused with any liberation movement. It is God who saves us from sin and death and brings us eternal life; this is the "essential meaning" of the evangelical message. The necessity of the human response was well stated in *Gaudium et spes*: Christians should give the witness of a faith that proves itself "by penetrating the believer's entire life, including its worldly dimensions and by activating him toward justice and love."³²

Bishop Torrella, referring to all these questions, and after much

²⁹ Cf. Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (New York: Paulist, 1977) 240; H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951) 10.

³⁰ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* 16-17; Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* 114. John Howard Yoder, from a Christian pacifist position, suggests an offense/defense approach based upon a theology of the cross: "His [the believer's] duty is not to bring the Powers to their knees. This is Jesus Christ's own task. . . . We are to be responsible for the defense, just because He takes care of the offense" (*The Politics of Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972] 152).

³¹ Cf. L. Alvarez Verdes, *El imperativo cristiano in San Pablo: La tension indicativo-imperativo en Rom. 6* (Valencia: Constitución San Jerónimo, 1980). See also, on the Thomistic philosophical basis of this approach, D. Mongillo, "La fondazione dell'agire nel Prologo della I-II," *Sapienza* 27 (1974) 261-71.

³² GS 21.

reflection, said: "You know, what we are really touching upon in the word 'constitutive' is nothing less than the relationship of the natural and supernatural." Cosmao, at the end of his letter, gives his own evaluation of the use of the term "constitutive": "I believe that today one may consider as 'received doctrine' what was said there. Perhaps it was unhappily put, but it did serve to underscore the historicity of the passover of Christ in the sense that it calls for the building of a world in which life might be possible for everybody."

The bishops at the 1971 synod did not wish to delve into these theological issues or break new doctrinal ground; they felt the doctrine was fairly well in place. They simply wished to issue a call for action and an appeal to conscience in response to the pleas for the witness of the Church to the cause of justice. The synod's response was the document *Justice in the World*, which by all accounts, in spite of the severe limitations under which they had to work, has proven to be the most influential statement ever coming from a synod. The reason for its influence, paradoxically, has been a strong and arresting term which at the time virtually passed without notice but remains the source of continued reflection within the Church on this most important aspect not only of her own life but the life of the whole world.

North American College, Rome

CHARLES M. MURPHY