

## WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO *OCTOGESIMA ADVENIENS*?

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**O***C***T***O***G***E***S***I***M***A* **A***D***V***E***N***I***E****N***S*, Paul VI's letter in 1971 to Maurice Cardinal Roy,<sup>1</sup> marked the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*. The letter, in particular its paragraph 4, was heralded as a central expression of a historically conscious methodology in magisterial teaching. Paul VI there highlighted the historically constituted nature of the social teaching of the Church, the role of the local community, and the difficulty as well as the undesirability of a single universal papal message or solution to problems. What has happened to this articulation of a historically conscious methodology in the last 20 years? One response to this question can be uncovered by tracing how and in which contexts this significant paragraph has been used in the encyclical teachings of John Paul II.

Although the historically constituted nature of the social teachings of the magisterium has already been documented,<sup>2</sup> one must remember first, that the works prior to Paul VI and Vatican Council II were not as devoid of historically conscious methodologies as some would like to believe,<sup>3</sup> and second, that *Gaudium et spes* and the writings of Paul VI were not as historically conscious as proponents would like to maintain.<sup>4</sup> Documentation has demonstrated, however, that the encyclical writings of John Paul II intentionally stray from the earlier emerging articulation of a historically conscious methodology<sup>5</sup> in pref-

<sup>1</sup> Paul VI, "Octogesima adveniensi," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 63 (1971) 401-44.

<sup>2</sup> Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983); Mary Elsbernd, "Rights Statements: A Hermeneutical Key to Continuing Development in Magisterial Teaching," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 62 (1986) 308-32.

<sup>3</sup> Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La "doctrine sociale" de l'Eglise comme idéologie* (Paris: Cerf, 1979); Charles E. Curran, *Directions in Catholic Social Ethics* (Notre Dame; University of Notre Dame, 1985); George Grima, "Method in the Social Teaching of the Church," *Melita Theologica* 33 (1982) 11-33; and David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition* (New York: Paulist, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Schuck makes this point well: "contemporary commentators sometimes ascribe to the popes a more plebiscitary understanding of what it means to read the 'signs of the times' than is warranted by the encyclicals" (*That They Be One* [Washington: Georgetown University, 1991] 157).

<sup>5</sup> Curran, *Directions* 33-36; Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992) 42-46; John Coleman, "Development of Church Social Teaching," *Origins* 11 (1981) 34-41; Ronald Modras, "Karl Rahner and John Paul II: Anthropological Implications for Economics and the Social Order," in *The Annual Publication*

erence for a transcendental<sup>6</sup> or Thomistic<sup>7</sup> personalism as the basis of universal and absolute norms transcending all historical contingency. This prior documentation provides a context for continuing theological reflection on the role of local Christian communities<sup>8</sup> as well as on the desirability of a single universal teaching.<sup>9</sup> There is a prevailing sense that the intentional straying from historically conscious methodology has left its impact in these areas as well.

In light of the above, this article proposes to examine John Paul II's use of *Octogesima adveniens*, in particular no. 4. We will begin with an examination of *Octogesima adveniens* in its historical and Catholic social-teaching context to determine its significance as an expression of a historically conscious methodology. Then we will examine how and in what contexts *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 is quoted in the writings of John Paul II. Finally, we will draw some conclusions about John Paul II's use of the passage and spell out some implications for Catholic social thought.

It is our contention that John Paul II stresses the continuity of Catholic social doctrine back to the gospel itself in a kind of unbroken chain. This continuity is seen by the pope as resting in its fundamental inspiration; in its principles of reflection, criteria of judgment, and basic directives for action; and in its link with the gospel. This approach is a departure from *Octogesima adveniens*, which held that Catholic social teachings had been worked out in history, i.e., that Catholic social teachings are historically constituted, that the local Christian community contributed to the development of Catholic social teachings, and that a single universal message is not the papal mission.

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*of the College Theology Society 31: Religion and Economic Ethics*, ed. Joseph F. Gower (Washington: Georgetown University, 1985) 123–50, esp. 142–47; and George H. Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II: Origins of His Thought and Action* (New York: Seabury, 1981). It is probable that the magisterial writings of John Paul II, like that of the popes of the previous centuries, are in fact influenced by the historical realities of these times. Given the reality of a God who reveals Godself in history, Incarnation, word and sacrament, it can hardly be otherwise.

<sup>6</sup> Bevens, *Models* 42–46.

<sup>7</sup> Modras, "The Thomistic Personalism of Pope John Paul II," *The Modern Schoolman* 59 (1982) 117–27. See also Karol Wojtyła, "Personalism Tomistyczny," *Znak* 13 (1961) 664–76. Modras notes that "Karol Wojtyła's philosophical career has been largely dedicated to achieving an ethics of absolute norms above the contingencies of history" ("Karl Rahner and John Paul II" 148). See also J. Bryan Hehir, "John Paul II: Continuity and Change in the Social Teaching of the Church," in *Readings in Moral Theology 5: Official Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist, 1986) 247–63 at 256.

<sup>8</sup> Liberation theology, feminist theology, black theology, as well as the movements of small Christian communities and national conferences of bishops have continued to experience and articulate the place of the local Christian communities.

<sup>9</sup> The exploration of social location as it is found in liberation, feminist, black, womanist, mujerista theologies continues to probe this strand with implications for Catholic social thought.

## OCTOGESIMA ADVENIENS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Octogesima adveniens* was not written in a historical vacuum nor in discontinuity from Catholic social teachings of the previous decade. Rather the letter continued themes found in *Gaudium et spes* and *Mater et magistra* and responded to the historical context in which it was written.

To mark the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, Paul VI did not write an encyclical letter, but rather an apostolic letter to Maurice Cardinal Roy, who was president of the Pontifical Commission *Justitia et Pax*. In fact, the last encyclical letter of his pontificate, *Humane vitae*, was written three years prior to this letter and ten years before his death. The move away from the encyclical as a literary form already suggests Paul VI's awareness of the importance of human experience or a historically conscious methodology. A look at the structure of *Octogesima adveniens* confirms this awareness. After a seven-paragraph introduction, *Octogesima adveniens* turns to a reading of the signs of the times (nos. 8–42), which highlight the challenges faced by particular groups of people (e.g. workers and women), world-wide issues (e.g. media influence and environment) and aspirations (e.g. participation and equality). The remainder of the letter provides some ecclesial reflections on these signs of the times and an exhortation to action. Thus, two-thirds of the letter (nos. 8–42) detail the historical context for any ecclesial reflection or action.

Paul VI himself had experienced firsthand the diverse situations in which Christians found themselves, especially in his journeys to Israel (1964), to the United States of America (1965), to India (1966), to Turkey and Portugal (1967), to Medellín, Colombia (1968), and to Uganda (1969). These encounters with the people of God, their poverty, and their misery profoundly moved Paul VI, as his Wednesday audience reflections attest.

In addition, the years since *Populorum progressio* and *Humane vitae* had been years of student unrest, violence, war, and genocide; and their pain was not lost on Paul VI.<sup>10</sup> His concern over the Paris student uprisings came out in two letters to the *Semaine Sociale* in France and in Italy.<sup>11</sup> He lamented the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps nowhere is his pain as clear as in his 1968 Christmas radio message; see "Radio message de Noël (December 20, 1968)," in *Documents pontificaux de Paul VI. Vol. 7, 1968* (Saint-Maurice: Éditions Saint-Augustin, 1971) 793–99. See also his response to the suffering connected with the Biafran struggle, in "The Heart of Africa," *The Pope Speaks* 14 (1969) 213–46, at 221.

<sup>11</sup> Each of these letters written by the Secretary of State conveys the apostolic blessing and thoughts of Paul VI: "Lettre de la secrétairerie d'État au Président des Semaines Sociales de France (June 30, 1968)," in *Documents pontificaux* 7.403–409, at 404; and "Lettre de la secrétairerie d'État au Président des Semaines Sociales d'Italie (September 15, 1968)," in *Documents pontificaux* 7.561–69, at 569.

and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>12</sup> He decried the Six Day War between Israel and the Arab nations, the war in Vietnam, the Czech-Soviet confrontation, and the Biafra civil war with its practices of genocide.

*Octogesima Adveniens No. 4*

Against the backdrop of this historical context, paragraph 4 appears as a papal reflection on Paul VI's experiences in this world, on its diversity, and on the widespread movements toward self-determination and participation:

In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection (*principia cogitandi*), norms of judgment (*iudicandi normas*) and directives for action (*regulas operandi*) from the social teaching (*e sociali doctrina*) of the Church. This social teaching has been worked out (*est confecta*) in the course of history. . . . It is up to these Christian communities, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the bishops who hold responsibility and in dialogue with other Christian brethren and all men (*sic*)<sup>13</sup> of goodwill, to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed. In this search for the changes which must be promoted, Christians must first of all renew their confidence in the forcefulness and special character of the demands made by the Gospel.

Paul VI here recognizes that worldwide diversity makes it difficult to set forth a solution with universal validity, and he goes on to maintain that one message and one solution is neither his ambition nor his mission. It is rather, the task of local Christian communities to analyze the local situation, to facilitate dialogue between the gospel, social teaching, and the local situation, and from that to undertake action to bring about change. This approach reflects the method developed in the 1920s by the Belgian priest, Joseph Cardijn, as foundational principles for the emerging Lay Apostolate movement, namely, Observe, Judge, Act.<sup>14</sup> While reminding the local Christian communities of the help of the Spirit, of the special character of the gospel, of their communion with bishops, of the necessity of dialogue with other Christians

<sup>12</sup> See *The Pope Speaks* 13 (1968) 144–46.

<sup>13</sup> Official translations of magisterial documents render *homo* by "man" in spite of the Latin term's inclusive meaning. Editorial preference and reading ease require that the editorial "sic" be omitted from subsequent quotations of magisterial documents.

<sup>14</sup> Recall the special growth of the YCS/YCW movements in the middle decades of this century. This context sheds some light on Roger Heckel's comment in the inaugural booklet of a proposed series, *The Social Teaching of John Paul II* (Vatican City: Pontifical Commission *Justitia et Pax*, 1980) 2: "In the spirit of *Octogesima*, 4, these booklets are essentially *working documents*" (emphasis original).

and concerned persons in this task, Paul VI explicitly assigns all three steps of the Cardijn method to the local Christian community.

John XXIII had earlier referred to the Cardijn method in *Mater et magistra*; however, he saw it serving a different function. According to *Mater et magistra*, the Cardijn method was a way which "should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice."<sup>15</sup> The surrounding paragraphs are concerned with how the social doctrine of the Church is known, taught, assimilated, and applied according to circumstances. *Mater et magistra* no. 220 specifically states that these social principles are universal in application because they take into account human nature, natural law, and the characteristics of contemporary society, although it also notes the contribution of a "very well-informed body of priests and laymen" in its construction. Thus John XXIII urged the use of the "Observe, Judge, Act" method as the way to apply social principles to specific situations. The principles were the starting point; the local situation was reviewed and then judged according to the principles in order to determine which principles the circumstances could tolerate in implementation.

In *Octogesima adveniens*, however, the local community was called, first, to analyze the local situations; second, to shed the light of the gospel's unalterable words as well as to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment, directives for action from the social teaching of the Church; third, to discern in light of the above the options and commitments needed to bring about social, political, and economic change. The starting point is reflection on the local situation by the local Christian community. The community then becomes the locus of dialogue between the situation and its traditions, namely Scripture and social teaching, in order to bring about action. The process is not application of ahistorical principles to situations, but dialogical discernment for action, emerging from concrete situations and the Christian traditions.

In light of future interpretations, the second of these steps, "judge," requires additional comment here. What is implied by "judge" relies on the resources both of the gospel and social teaching, unlike *Mater et magistra* which relied only on social principles. Principles of reflection, norms of judgment, and directives for action are drawn from social teaching, which is constituted in history. Although this phrase will be interpreted otherwise, the interpretation consistent with the whole of no. 4 (as well as no. 42) maintains that social teaching itself is historically constituted via a dialogical development in Christian communities between the resources of their traditions and their specific situation prior to discernment for action. This position is strengthened by the Latin text, in which the statement that "this social teaching has been worked out in the course of history" is part of the previous sentence. This approach recognizes the participation of local Christian communities in the development of social teaching.

<sup>15</sup> John XXIII, "Mater et magistra," AAS 53 (1961) 401-64, at 456.

In fact by 1971 the YCS/YCW movements had passed their zenith, at least in the U.S. However, thousands of Catholics in the U.S. who grew up in the YCS/YCW movements took up the challenge of local initiative and participation in their Christian and human communities. These Catholics did not look to magisterial teaching for principles to apply to local social, political, and economic issues. Rather, trusting in the Spirit of Jesus, the community discerned a course of action through mutual dialogue with both the situation and the traditions expressed in the gospel and social teachings.<sup>16</sup>

Paul VI's quite remarkable statement of historical consciousness stands in contrast to the "Gospel's unalterable words," as well as the "forcefulness and special character" of its demands. Thus it seems that for Paul VI, the gospel stands as the universal and unchanging truth, while social teachings develop historically. However, throughout this paragraph *doctrina* is used in the singular, to which fact some students of the encyclicals point as evidence of a well-defined and unchanging body of thought, i.e. doctrine.<sup>17</sup> The context does not support this understanding, although it may well be one of the instances where Paul VI is not as inductive as proponents of a historically conscious approach would like him to be.<sup>18</sup>

Later, in *Octogesima adveniens* no. 42, Paul VI raises the question of the role of the universal Church, perhaps as a counterbalance to the role given to the local church in no. 4. Here he states:

If today the problems seem original in their breadth and their urgency, is man without the means of solving them? It is with all its dynamism that the social teaching of the Church (*socialis ecclesiae doctrina*) accompanies men in their search. If it does not intervene to authenticate a given structure or propose a ready-made model, it does not thereby limit itself to recalling general principles. It develops (*crescit*) through reflection applied to the changing situations of this world, under the driving force of the Gospel as the source of renewal when its message is accepted in its totality and with all its demands. It also develops with sensitivity proper to the Church which is characterized by a disinterested will to serve and by attention to the poorest. Finally it draws upon its rich experience of many centuries which enables it, while continuing

<sup>16</sup> Coleman makes a similar point, namely that the question is, What has Catholic social teachings formed? To which he responds: "They have formed over the past 90 years men and women who have found in them a charter to become concerned about institutional and structural reform, to support organization for justice, to heed the papal call to respect human dignity and to go to the poor. These men and women and the Catholic movements they have spawned are the best exegesis of the documents" ("Development" 40-41).

<sup>17</sup> My use of terms reflects the precise Latin term wherever possible, i.e., doctrine (teaching) or teachings, although I should prefer to employ the term "social teachings," which conveys the historically constitutive nature of magisterial teachings. Occasionally I use "Catholic social thought" as a term broader than "magisterial teachings."

<sup>18</sup> For a further illustration, see *Populorum* nos. 2 and 3, where Paul VI opts for the Leonine expression "the social question," when exhorting persons to shed the light of the gospel on the contemporary situation.

its permanent preoccupations, to undertake the daring and creative innovations which the present state of the world requires.

Paul VI's reflections here reveal an understanding of the Church as a pilgrim people searching for solutions to the urgent problems of the world. The passage then attempts to delineate a middle ground for social teaching between "recalling general principles" and concrete intervention. In his effort to find this middle ground Paul VI restates the position that social teaching develops through reflection on the changing situations of each era in the light of the gospel. The gospel is unchanging; contemporary situations are changing; and social teachings are the historically constituted responses emerging from the dialogue between gospel and contemporary situations. In this mediating role, social teaching lives under the gospel, serves the building up of the reign of God in the world, attends to the poorest and draws on its centuries-long experience. This approach provides fertile soil for permanent preoccupations (not answers) and creative innovations within the social teaching of the Church.

#### *Octogesima Adveniens and Gaudium et Spes*

Thus, while Paul VI's statements add to John XXIII's use of the Cardijn method (Observe, Judge, Act), *Octogesima adveniens* also reflects several significant themes from *Gaudium et spes*. The concept of the Church as the people of God alive by the Spirit of Jesus in the world provides a conceptual framework which *Octogesima adveniens* both draws on and takes a step further. This can be seen particularly in the proposed methodologies and in the role of the whole people of God. Three points serve to illustrate this change.

First, *Gaudium et spes* no. 4 proposes a methodology of "scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" in order to discern appropriate social action. *Gaudium et spes* no. 4 presents this methodology as the Church's duty in carrying out the mission of Christ to understand the world and respond to its perennial questions. No. 11 invites the people of God to take up the task:

The people of God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this people has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human.

The Spirit present in the whole earth enables the people of God to scrutinize the signs of the times, to interpret them in the light of faith so as to determine fully human solutions. This constellation of the whole people, the Spirit, and social action are essential aspects in *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4.

Second, with its articulation of the Church in the world, *Gaudium et*

*spes* recognizes that the Church is a historical reality with visible social structures and that there is mutual exchange and assistance between the Church and the world. No. 44, which most clearly acknowledges this mutual exchange, begins by noting that the Church has profited from past experiences, the sciences, human culture, and philosophy. It continues:

For thus the ability to express Christ's message in its own way is developed in each nation, and at the same time there is fostered a living exchange between the Church and the diverse cultures of people. To promote such exchange, especially in our days, the Church requires the special help of those who live in the world, are versed in different institutions and specialties, and grasp their innermost significance in the eyes of both believers and unbelievers. With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire people of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine Word. In this way, revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and set forth to greater advantage.

Living as the Church in the world requires the special help of those who live in the world as well as the whole people of God to discern the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the gospel. In fact this living exchange ought to be promoted. In this context, then, the task of the whole people of God is delineated as hearing, distinguishing and interpreting the contemporary situation; judging it in light of the gospel; in order to understand and articulate the truth. No. 44 concludes that whoever helps the human community contributes also to the Church. *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 will build on this mutual exchange between Church and world as well as on the task of the whole people of God and the place of the gospel.

Third, the conciliar understanding of the Church in the world results in a synthesis of religious life and earthly affairs, as well as in defining a distinct role for the laity:

Laymen should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law<sup>19</sup> is inscribed in the life of the earthly city; from priests they may look for spiritual light and nourishment. Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> In the context of no. 43, divine law does not appear to be used in the specific Thomistic sense. Rather it is mentioned as one more instance highlighting the inseparability of religious and the social-question orientation. This paragraph also refers to faith and daily life, religious values and social enterprises, world and Christian spirit, as well as witness to Christ and human society. Divine law is paired with "laws proper to each discipline."

<sup>20</sup> *Gaudium et spes* no. 43.



Self-directed action by the laity is a consequence of a well-formed Christian conscience (compare *Gaudium et spes* no. 16) enlightened by Christian wisdom and attentive to the teaching authority of the Church. Pastors provide light and nourishment, but not concrete solutions, which stand outside the mission of the priest. Paragraph 43 goes on to say that the laity have an active role in the whole Church, are called to penetrate the world with a Christian spirit, and are invited to witness to Christ in all things. *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 is shaped by the same primacy of conscience and the same synthesis of Church and world.

Thus we see that many of the ideas put forth by Paul VI in *Octogesima adveniens* emerge from *Gaudium et spes*. Conciliar theology set forth a distinct role for the laity rooted in informed Christian conscience and wisdom which cannot expect pastors to give solutions. *Octogesima adveniens* took a further step, stating that unified messages and universally valid solutions are not the mission of papal teaching, but belong to local Christian communities, i.e. a collective informed Christian conscience.<sup>21</sup>

Conciliar theology described the Church as the pilgrim people of God integrally connected with the whole of humankind and its history: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."<sup>22</sup> From this theological starting point, Paul VI could maintain that "social teaching has been worked out in history."

Finally, conciliar theology sets forth a methodology for reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the gospel. *Octogesima adveniens* elaborates this methodology by including the place of social teaching and highlighting the social-action or praxis orientation of the project.

#### USE OF OCTOGESIMA ADVENIENS BY JOHN PAUL II

As one would expect, it is John Paul II's fundamental understanding of the Church and the role of the laity that provide the theological context within which he describes Catholic social doctrine. A study of John Paul II's use and reinterpretation of *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 provides a tool with which to probe his understanding of social doctrine.

Although study of the theological context out of which John Paul II writes is outside of our scope and has been done by others,<sup>23</sup> mention

<sup>21</sup> It is the task of another study to determine if this is in fact the beginning of lay participation in the formation of Catholic social teachings.

<sup>22</sup> *Gaudium et spes* no. 1.

<sup>23</sup> See Modras, "Karl Rahner and John Paul II"; Modras, "Thomistic Personalism"; John Hellman, "John Paul II and the Personalist Movement," *Cross Currents* 30 (1980-1981) 409-19; Bevans, *Models* 42-46; John Carmody, *The Encyclical Theology of Pope*

of a few conclusions pertinent to our topic is in order. First, John Paul II's philosophical training in phenomenology leaves him more at home with philosophical concepts than with scriptural exegesis. Thus while he considers Scripture the source of social doctrine, one looks in vain for a critical, exegetical incorporation of the scriptural tradition into social doctrine. His studied conviction that phenomenology could not provide objective moral norms led John Paul II to build a system on universal truths, permanent principles, absolute norms, and a material-spiritual dualism.<sup>24</sup> Since the spiritual world is superior to the material world, hierarchical order, suspicion of and domination over the material world become central concepts.<sup>25</sup> John Paul II's philosophical contact with personalism is apparent in his insistence on human dignity and rights, albeit with an individualistic slant which influences concepts like common good, structural change, and sin.<sup>26</sup>

From his Polish Catholic experience within political systems of the extreme right during World War II and of the left in the postwar Eastern Block, John Paul II knows the reality of a Church in conflict with society, the need for a united front against the opposing forces, and the dichotomy between Church and world. In such a lived reality there is little place for local autonomy or diversity but rather much insistence on a unity of doctrine as a corpus or an organic body of truths of which the Church is the guardian and teacher.<sup>27</sup> It is within this general theo-philosophical framework that John Paul II uses and reinterprets *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4.

#### *Opening Address at Puebla*

The first time John Paul II refers to *Octogesima adveniens* is during the opening address at the South American Bishops Conference meeting at Puebla in January, 1979.

What we have already recalled constitutes a rich and complex heritage, which

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*John Paul II*, Warren Lecture Series in Catholic Studies (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma, 1990); George Huntston Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II* (New York, Seabury, 1991); Charles E. Curran, "The Changing Anthropological Bases in Catholic Social Thought," in Curran, *Directions* 32-36; and Richard McBrien, "Papal, Bishops' Ships 'Passed in the Night,'" *National Catholic Reporter* 23 (2 October 1987) 1 and 28-30. In the 1980s several French-language studies appeared specifically about the social teaching of John Paul II: P. Georges M. M. Cottier, "Profil herménéutico-épistémologique de la doctrine sociale de l'Eglise," *Seminarium* 29 (1989) 223-31; Ph.-I. André-Vincent, *La Doctrine sociale de Jean Paul II* (Paris: France-Empire, 1983).

<sup>24</sup> See Modras, "Karl Rahner and John Paul II" 138.

<sup>25</sup> "The essential meaning of this 'kingship' and 'dominion' of man over the visible world, which the creator himself gave man for his task, consists in the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and in the superiority of spirit over matter" (John Paul II, "Redemptor Hominis," *Origins* 8 [1979] 625-44, at 635); Latin text in AAS 71 (1979) 257-324.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 636, in which transformation of economic structures depends on individual conversion.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 632.

*Evangelii nuntiandi* (no. 38) calls the social doctrine or social teaching of the church.<sup>28</sup> This teaching comes into being, in the light of the word of God and the authentic magisterium, from the presence of Christians in the midst of the changing situations of the world, in contact with the challenges that result from those situations. This social doctrine involves therefore both principles for reflection and also norms for judgment and guidelines for action (compare *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4).

Placing responsible confidence in this social doctrine, even though some people seek to sow doubts and lack of confidence in it, to give it serious study, to try to apply it, to be faithful to it—all this is the guarantee, in a member of the church, of his commitment in the delicate and demanding social tasks and of his efforts in favor of the liberation or advancement of his brothers and sisters.<sup>29</sup>

This initial use of *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 by John Paul II appears to focus on three categories: principles for reflection, norms for judgment, and guidelines for action. They are already stripped from their context in the overall schema of Observe, Judge, Act. There is no reference to local Christian communities observing the local situation; there is no reference to judging these situations in light of the gospel and Catholic social teaching; and there is no reference to discernment of the options and commitments necessary to effect change.

In addition, the relationship between social doctrine and action of Christians, as presented in *Evangelii nuntiandi* no. 38, is blurred. Social doctrine was presented there as a foundation of wisdom and experience, which the Christian must “concretely translate into forms of action, participation, and commitment” for the liberation of many. This is not accurately reflected in John Paul II’s statement.

Instead John Paul II tells the South American bishops, first, that the source of social doctrine is the presence of Christians in a challenging world enlightened by the gospel and the magisterium (not social teaching, unless social teaching is equated with the magisterium); second, that social doctrine is equated with principles for reflection, norms for judgment, and guidelines for action (not a method for utilizing social teaching); and third, that members of the Church are to study, apply, be faithful to social doctrine, as a guarantee of commitment to social action and liberation. Thus, although the members of the Church are present in the world, their role is to apply and be faithful to the social doctrine they have been given; their role is not active discernment of the situation using the gospel and social teaching to determine a course of action. There is no mention of the Spirit or consultation with the Christian and human communities.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Paul VI, “*Evangelii nuntiandi*,” AAS 68 (1976) 5–76, at 29–30, does in fact use the singular construction “social doctrine”; cf. Heckel, *Social Teaching* 23, who holds that John Paul II uses these terms and a number of others as equivalent.

<sup>29</sup> *Origins* 8 (8 February 1979) 529–38, at 538 (III. 7).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. John Paul II, “Address to the Workers in Monterrey (January 31, 1979)” in *Osservatore Romano*, 19 February 1979, 7 (English ed.): “I make a forceful appeal to the public authorities, contractors and workers, to reflect on these principles and to deduce

*John Paul II's Early Encyclicals*

John Paul II does not quote *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 in his first three social encyclicals, namely *Redemptor hominis*,<sup>31</sup> *Dives in misericordia*, and *Laborem exercens*, although *Redemptor hominis* no. 16 does refer in a footnote to *Octogesima adveniens* no. 42, when it calls for "daring creative resolves in keeping with man's authentic dignity."<sup>32</sup> Its appearance in a section on the economic threats and challenges of the contemporary era does resemble the context of *Octogesima adveniens* no. 42 on the role of the Church in accompanying the Christian in a world of new questions and problems.

When he wrote *Laborem exercens*, John Paul II did not refer in a footnote to *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4, nor for that matter *Rerum novarum*, whose 90th anniversary *Laborem exercens* celebrates. *Laborem exercens* nos. 2 and 3 do, however, shed some light on John Paul II's method as well as his understanding of who contributes to social teaching. First, John Paul views *Laborem exercens* "in organic connection with the whole tradition of this [the Church's] teaching and activity." That is, while the social doctrine embraces both teaching and activity, there is one organic unity traced back to the Scriptures. According to John Paul II, this "traditional patrimony was inherited and developed by the teaching of the popes." His use of footnotes underscores his efforts to link his teaching back to the gospel source.<sup>33</sup>

*Laborem exercens* nos. 2 and 3 make four references to development of church doctrine. While this could signal a historically conscious methodology, a closer look yields a different picture. First, the text makes clear that it is the magisterium itself that brings about the "development" by bringing up to date "ageless Christian truth." The people, the historical situation, and the activities of practitioners apply the teaching but do not shape its development. Second, the "trend of development of the Church's teaching and commitment in the social question exactly corresponds to the objective recognition of the state of

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the consequent lines of action. It must also be recognized that there is no lack of examples of those who put into practice, in an exemplary way, these principles of the social doctrine of the Church."

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II's inaugural encyclical promulgated shortly after Puebla is included among the social encyclicals, given its treatment of human dignity, human rights, and the common good.

<sup>32</sup> Heckel does not shed light on this quotation with his comment: "By way of a direct quote, a summary reference, or further development, John Paul II often refers to *Octogesima* 42, where Paul VI clearly illustrated the constituent features of the social teaching of the Church" (*Social Teaching* 24). Even if John Paul II understood the constituent features of Catholic social teaching as its historical consciousness and its accompanying nature, the connection to daring creative resolves and dignity are not clear.

<sup>33</sup> The Scriptures are referred to in footnotes 98 times; all other references combined equal 23, including eleven references to *Gaudium et spes* nos. 33–39 ("Man's Activity throughout the World") and nine references to the *Summa theologiae*.

affairs." In other words, a parallel-track system is operative: on the one hand, the "objective recognition of the state of affairs," which apparently is one step removed from the actual state of affairs and filtered through those who do the recognizing, and on the other, "the development of the Church's teaching." The context of this sentence in no. 2 does not suggest that social doctrine was shaped by its historical context, but rather that the unfolding of world events corresponded to the wisdom of a developing social doctrine, albeit in two disparate spheres (i.e. of the parallel-track system we just mentioned).

The parallel-track approach in John Paul's methodology also manifests itself in other divisions and distinctions such as between teaching and activity, doctrine and commitment. Doctrine maintains ageless Christian teaching, which is more fully understood in the passage of time, while activity and commitment constitute its applications throughout the ages. Thus, John Paul II's neglect of *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 appears to signal at least an unconscious shift from its historically conscious methodology.

This conclusion is supported by John Paul's comments, in these same two paragraphs of *Laborem exercens*, concerning the question of who contributes to social teaching. He notes that the social question has engaged the Church's attention in three locations: first, "the documents of the magisterium issued by the popes and the Second Vatican Council";<sup>34</sup> second, "pronouncements by individual episcopates"; and third, "the activity of various centers of thought and of practical apostolic initiatives," or later "manifestations of the commitment of the Church and of Christians." While this passage does not directly answer the question, when it is read against the backdrop of John Paul's methodological understanding, some conclusions, or at least inferences, become quite probable.

First, the exclusion of conferences of bishops suggests that bishops have no more magisterial authority as a body than as individuals. This is further underscored by a later statement that the Pontifical Commission *Justitia et Pax*, "which has corresponding bodies within the individual bishops' conferences," has the function of coordinating the level three activities and commitments. In this schema, apparently both the Pontifical Commission and bishops' conferences coordinate the application of Catholic social doctrine, but they do not contribute to its development.

Second, the link of theological thinking with praxis could well reflect a certain awareness of experience as a starting point for theological thinking; however, given the operative methodology, it seems rather to imply that such thinking ought to be concerned with the application of social doctrine to social action.

<sup>34</sup> The primary nature of the magisterium is highlighted in the next paragraph, where the social encyclicals and *Gaudium et spes* are called the "documents of the supreme magisterium of the Church."

And finally, the third location of engaged attention distinguishes between the Church and Christians. Since the encyclical greeting includes "all men and women of good will," this is a possible reference to those Christians who are not Roman Catholic. Such an interpretation, however, would then omit reference to social action by persons from other major religious traditions. Given the two-track methodology, namely doctrine and its application, a case can be made for a distinction between the magisterium which develops social doctrine and Christians who apply that teaching in their historical circumstances. Such a distinction is a clear departure from *Octogesima adveniens*.

### *Libertatis Conscientia*

In 1986 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued *Libertatis conscientia* as the second and positive instruction dealing with theology of liberation.<sup>35</sup> *Libertatis conscientia* no. 72 is of particular interest to us for two reasons. First, John Paul II subsequently quotes this passage with *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*; and second, this passage serves as the single footnoted reference in a section listing "essential documents describing and defining the nature of social doctrine" from *Guidelines for Teaching the Church's Social Doctrine in Forming Priests*.<sup>36</sup>

In *Libertatis conscientia* no. 72, one reads:

The church's social teaching is born of the encounter of the gospel message and of its demands . . . with the problems emanating from the life of society. This social teaching has established itself as a doctrine (*doctrinae corpus*) by using the resources of human wisdom and the sciences. It concerns the ethical aspect of this life. It takes into account the technical aspects of problems but always in order to judge them from the moral point of view.

Being essentially oriented toward action, this teaching (*doctrina*) develops in accordance with the changing circumstances of history. That is why, together with principles that are always valid, it (*doctrina*) also involves contingent judgments. Far from constituting a closed system, it (*doctrina*) remains constantly open to the new questions which continually arise; it requires the contribution of all charisms, experiences and skills.

As an "expert in humanity" the church offers by her social doctrine (*doctrina sociali*) a set of principles for reflection ("*principiorum doctrinalium*") and criteria for judgment ("*criteriorum iudicandi*")<sup>(107)</sup> and also directives for action ("*regulas et impulsiones ad agendum*")<sup>(108)</sup> so that the profound changes demanded by situations of poverty and injustice may be brought about, and this in a way which serves the true good of humanity.

Footnote 107 to the text attributes the preceding expressions to *Oc-*

<sup>35</sup> "Libertatis conscientia." AAS 79 (1987) 554-99; an English translation, "Instruction of Christian Freedom and Liberation," appeared in *Origins* 15 (17 April 1986) 513-28.

<sup>36</sup> The English edition appears in *The Pope Speaks* 34 (1989) 293-342. The Italian edition appears in *Seminarium* 29 (1989) 135-211.

*togesima adveniens* no. 4 and to John Paul II's address at Puebla.<sup>37</sup> Footnote 108 refers the expression *regulas et impulsiones ad agendum* to John XXIII's, *Mater et magistra* no. 235.<sup>38</sup> As noted earlier, *Mater et magistra* no. 236 lists the "three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice," that is, observation, judgment, and action. Several noteworthy changes have occurred in *Libertatis conscientia*.

First, the trio Observe, Judge, Act is tied to Christian action alone. This departs from *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4, wherein principles, norms, and directives along with the gospel were the resources used by the Christian community to assess the local situation for appropriate action. Since all three terms were used in *Octogesima adveniens*, there would be no need to refer to *Mater et magistra* no. 236, unless one wanted to link Observe, Judge, Act solely with the "reduction of social principles into practice," and break the link with the development of social teaching. Such an interpretation is valid only when the single sentence from *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 concerning principles of reflection, norms for judgment, and directives for action is taken from its context.

Second, the Church already has and offers the principles, criteria, and directives. Thus the Christian only has to put them into practice. This point is further strengthened by the change from "*principia cogitandi*" in *Octogesima adveniens* to "*principiorum doctrinalium*" in *Libertatis conscientia*. Note, however, that the document stops short of calling these modifications of the three stages "principles that are always valid." By contrast, in *Octogesima adveniens* the Christian community participates in working out the social teaching in history.

Third, the starting point is social doctrine, not the local situation. Fourth, the gospel and social problems gave birth to the social doctrine of the Church, which then "established itself as a doctrine by using the resources of human wisdom and the sciences." Apparently once spawned by the gospel, social doctrine relies on the human sciences to become *doctrinae corpus* and to determine permanently valid principles and contingent judgments. The gospel is a progenitor of Catholic social doctrine, not an active dialogue partner with it in the local situation. This initial explanation of both the unchanging and the historical nature of social teaching will appear again.

Fifth, social doctrine advances in history via continuously arising new questions; it is not constituted in the course of history as in *Octogesima adveniens*.

<sup>37</sup> "Oratio habita initio Conferentiae de Puebla," AAS 71 (1979) 203. The references in the Latin text depart from their quoted citations.

<sup>38</sup> AAS 53 (1961) 461 is the citation given. The correct reference, however, appears to be no. 236 on p. 456. The formulation in *Mater et magistra* no. 236 bears little resemblance to that in *Libertatis conscientia*.

*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*

In *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), John Paul II commemorates the 20th anniversary of *Populorum progressio* and offers some additional insights on his reinterpretation of *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4. In the introductory paragraphs, the pope addresses the permanent and contingent dimensions of social doctrine as the second of his two reasons for writing, expressing his desire,

following in the footsteps of my esteemed predecessors in the See of Peter, to reaffirm the continuity of the social doctrine (*doctrinae socialis*) as well as its constant renewal. In effect, continuity and renewal are a proof of the perennial value of the teaching (*doctrinae*) of the Church. This twofold dimension is typical of the teaching in the social sphere. On the one hand it is constant, for it remains identical in its fundamental inspiration, in its "principles of reflection" (*cogitationis rationibus*), in its "criteria of judgment" (*iudicii normis*), in its basic "directives for action" (*legibus principibus, quae actionem moderantur*),<sup>61</sup> and above all in its vital link with the Gospel of the Lord. On the other hand, it is ever new, because it is subject to the necessary opportune adaptations suggested by the unceasing flow of events which are the setting of the life of people and society.<sup>39</sup>

According to this paragraph, the constancy of social doctrine rests in its unspecified fundamental inspiration, in its link with the gospel, and in principles of reflection, criteria of judgment, and basic directives for action. The last point carries a footnote reference to *Libertatis conscientia* no. 72 and *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4, as if both of them confirmed this statement. In fact *Sollicitudo rei socialis* takes *Libertatis conscientia* a step further with its explicit identification of the principles, norms, and directives as constant elements of social doctrine. One might hope for some distinction between the three dimensions based on content, method, and specific action suggestions, if one could not hope for fidelity to the original context. If, however, all three are equally constants, specific actions become right or wrong in and of themselves, apart from circumstances, intentions, and actors. In addition to extending the position of *Libertatis conscientia* no. 72, the quotation of *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 in order to prove that social doctrine entails perennial truths taught by the magisterium is a clear distortion of Paul VI's earlier stress on the local community, the historically constituted nature of social teaching, and the undesirability of one universal papal teaching.

Although the doctrine is constant, it can in fact be adapted and applied to specific situations. These situations apparently do not change the doctrine itself, but shape how the permanent truth might best be accepted in the local situation. This point becomes clearer in no. 8:

<sup>39</sup> AAS 80 (1988) 513–86, at 515.



In addition, the social doctrine of the church (*socialis christianorum doctrina*) has once more demonstrated its character as an application of the word of God to people's lives and the life of society as well as to the earthly realities connected with them, offering "principles of reflection," "criteria of judgment," and "directives of action" (*principia . . . a recta ratione postulata . . . orientationesque quasdem*).<sup>[20]</sup> Here, in the document of Paul VI, one finds these three elements with prevalently practical orientation, that is, directed toward moral conduct.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to confirming that social doctrine is to be applied to situations, this paragraph relies on the interpretation made in *Libertatis conscientia*, namely that Observe, Judge, Act is the method used to reduce social principles into action alone. No mention is made of the larger context, namely, analysis by the local community, judgment in the light of the gospel and social teaching, as well as discernment of the community's options for action, all this in consultation with the Holy Spirit and the larger ecclesial, Christian, and human communities.

The loss of this context is also apparent in the very structure of the encyclical. *Sollicitudo rei socialis* begins with an introduction and review of social doctrine (nos. 1–10). Only in Section 3 does it begin a survey of the contemporary world, i.e. the signs of the times (nos. 11–26). Sections 4 and 5 return to development (nos. 27–34) and a theological reading of contemporary social problems (nos. 35–40), before section 6 (nos. 41–45) gives some practical guidelines. Although Observe, Judge, Act could provide the underlying structure of *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, a presentation of social doctrine precedes the magisterial effort at observation, judgment and action. In addition it is the magisterium, not the Christian community, that employs this method.

The twin poles of judgment in *Octogesima adveniens* have become one: social doctrine is the contemporary application of the gospel in the social order. Consequently if the gospel is unalterable, then social doctrine is permanent and always valid. Since social doctrine is unchanging, all that remains is the propagation and dissemination of the doctrine. *Sollicitudo rei socialis* speaks of evangelization in this vein:

As her instrument for reaching this goal, the church uses her social doctrine (*sociali sua doctrina*). In today's difficult situation, a more exact awareness and a wider diffusion of the "set of principles for reflection, criteria for judgment and the directives for action" proposed by the church's teaching,<sup>[72]</sup> would be of great help in promoting both the correct definition of the problems being faced and the best solution to them.<sup>41</sup>

In summary, in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, John Paul II stresses the continuity of social doctrine back to the gospel itself in a kind of un-

<sup>40</sup> The Latin terms are included in the text as quoted. Footnote 20 gives the same citations as footnote 6, although the Latin text of *Sollicitudo rei socialis* no. 8 is altered yet again.

<sup>41</sup> *Sollicitudo rei socialis* no. 41. Footnote 72 again cites both *Libertatis conscientia* no.

broken chain. The principles of reflection, criteria of judgment, and basic directives for action no longer reflect how the Christian uses social doctrine, but have become the content of social doctrine. In addition, this doctrine is constant and not historically constituted. The constancy of social doctrine precludes a starting point in the contemporary situation.

Finally, when social doctrine is universally valid, the Christian community need only apply it to the local situation and not engage in its historically contextualized development. This interpretive shift is possible when a single sentence in *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 is used out of its original context, where both the activity of the local church and the nature of social teaching are viewed as historically constituted.

### *Guidelines for Teaching the Church's Social Doctrine*

Although the document *Guidelines for Teaching the Church's Social Doctrine in Forming Priests* (1988) was issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education, it is relevant to this study. Its introduction cites *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4, alluding to the Church's limits in providing solutions to all problems due to the different situations in which Christians are engaged. This apparently accurate use of *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 is, however, qualified by the following:

On the other hand, she can and must, in the "light which comes to her from the Gospel" provide the principles and necessary guidelines for the correct organization of social life, for the dignity of the human person, and for the common good. The Magisterium, in fact, continues to intervene often in this field with a doctrine that all the faithful are called upon to know, teach, and apply.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, while the Church is limited in providing solutions to all problems, it does have principles and guidelines from magisterial doctrine, which the faithful are to learn, teach, and apply. The qualification seems to suggest that the absence of solutions is in fact a limitation coming from the diversity and magnitude of the problems, but not from the historically constituted nature of the social doctrine itself. This differs from Paul VI's position in *Octogesima adveniens*.

The *Guidelines* then address "The Nature of Social Doctrine" (nos. 3–13). In no. 3, *Libertatis conscientia* no. 72 alone is named as the "essential document describing and defining the nature of social doctrine." The same paragraph distinguishes between "principles which are always valid" and "contingent judgments," a distinction also found in *Libertatis conscientia* no. 72.

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72 and *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4. In spite of the quotation marks, the quoted words again deviate from both sources.

<sup>42</sup> See *The Pope Speaks* 34 (1989) 293–340, at 295.

No. 6 describes three interconnected and inseparable dimensions of social doctrine: the theoretical, the historical, and the practical. The theoretical dimension refers to the universal criteria and permanent principles formulated in organic and systematic reflection. The practical dimension includes the application of the principles in the concrete situations in which Christians find themselves. The historical dimension refers to the use of principles with a view to the real social order in magisterial documents. This dimension could be said to be conscious of historical realities. As such it differs from the theoretical, but is not yet application. This is a helpful clarification on the current magisterium's understanding of historical consciousness, but it is a far cry from historically constituted social teachings.

No. 7 presents the triad Observe, Judge, Act as the "inductive-deductive" methodology of social doctrine without reference to *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4, although it does mention *Mater et magistra* no. 236. A most enlightening contribution of this paragraph is the attribution of the various stages to various groups. To Observe is the function of the human and social sciences, apparently with no recourse to faith;<sup>43</sup> to Judge is the "function proper to the Magisterium of the Church",<sup>44</sup> while "real Christians" are invited to Act by following the doctrine.<sup>45</sup> The gospel is mentioned in the judging phase as including a scale of values to which the Church adapts. The Holy Spirit appears to be mentioned in the acting phase as a "particular assistance promised by Christ to His Church," which matures the pastoral experience and the reflection of the magisterium.<sup>46</sup> This mention, however, seems to link the particular assistance to the magisterium alone as a reason for the "real Christian to follow this doctrine."

*Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 is cited in no. 8 when the conversation turns to discernment of the "entire Christian community, and each one in particular, to 'scrutinize the signs of the times' and to interpret

<sup>43</sup> "Seeing is perception and study of real problems and their causes, the analysis of which, however, belongs to the human and social sciences" (ibid. 298).

<sup>44</sup> "Judging is interpretation of that same reality in the light of the sources of social doctrine which determine the judgment pronounced with regard to social phenomena and their ethical implications. In this intermediate phase is found the function proper to the Magisterium of the Church which consists precisely in interpreting reality from the viewpoint of faith and offering 'what it has of its own: a global view about man and humanity'" (ibid.); a footnote at this point cites *Populorum progressio* no. 13.

<sup>45</sup> "Acting is aimed at implementing these choices. . . . By inviting the faithful to make concrete choices and to act according to the principles and judgments expressed in its social doctrine, the Magisterium offers the fruit of much reflection and pastoral experience matured under the particular assistance promised by Christ to His Church. It is up to the real Christian to follow this doctrine and to make it 'the foundation of his wisdom and of his experience in order to translate it concretely into forms of action, participation and commitment'" (ibid.); a footnote at this point cites *Evangelii nuntiandi* no. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

reality in the light of the evangelical message."<sup>47</sup> Either this paragraph is inconsistent with the above distinctions in phases and roles, or the discernment described properly belongs to the action phase, so that the Christian is invited to discern how to apply the conclusions reached by the judgment of the magisterium. Discernment, then, has separated from development of social teaching as a whole, and is relegated to the action phase alone. Therein the entire community is charged to discern, that is,

to arrive, in light of permanent principles, at an objective judgment about social reality and, according to the possibilities and opportunities offered by the circumstances, to make concrete the most appropriate choices which may eliminate injustices and favor the political, economic and cultural transformations needed in individual cases.<sup>48</sup>

So it has come to this. *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 is not about constituting social teaching in the course of history with the help of the Spirit in the community and with broad consultation. Rather the Spirit is linked to the magisterium; the methodological steps are parsed out among the social sciences, the magisterium, and the faithful; and discernment has been relegated to the application of social doctrine. *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 is not about the initiative of local communities in the continuing development of social teaching; rather, "real Christians" apply the most appropriate course of action from among those already judged by the magisterium as social doctrine.

In the only other acknowledgment of *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4, the passage is linked with the effort to make social doctrine concrete "by proposing principles for reflection and permanent values, criteria for judgment and directives for action."<sup>49</sup> Observe, Judge, Act is here separated as a whole from the development of social teaching and transferred into the realm of concrete application.<sup>49</sup> The context is the final sentence of the section, "Formation of the Historical Heritage," directed to illustrating a central thesis, namely that, although there is a consistent and permanent corpus which constitutes social doctrine, it is not a closed system, because it responds to new problems or to old problems in new garb.<sup>50</sup>

### *Centesimus annus*

As a kind of whimper, in *Centesimus annus* (The Hundredth Year) (1991) *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4 is referred to in a footnote only once. In the context of a discussion on capitalism, the encyclical notes:

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 300 (no. 11). In addition to *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4, footnote 69 also cites *Mater et magistra* no. 454, *Oratio (Puebla)* 203 (III, no. 7), and *Libertatis conscientia* no. 72.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 300 (nos. 11–12); see also 312 (nos. 27–28).

The church has no models to present; models that are real and truly effective can only arise within the framework of different historical situations through the efforts of all those who responsibly confront concrete problems in all their social, economic, political, and cultural aspects as these interact with one another.<sup>[84]61</sup>

Footnote 84 cites *Gaudium et spes* no. 36, which admits the autonomy of disciplines like economics, and *Octogesima adveniens* nos. 2–5, which makes the stronger statement that the Church does not have a unified message nor a solution with universal validity nor is it the mission or ambition of the Church to have such a solution or message. However, the statement in *Centesimus annus* appears with no immediate reference to Catholic social doctrine or teachings.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In the course of the twenty years of magisterial teaching we have surveyed, a single sentence referring to principles, norms, and directives drawn from social doctrine has been separated from the whole of *Octogesima adveniens* no. 4. This is in line with the method of magisterial reinterpretation as it has been practiced for centuries. This particular reinterpretation, however, entailed a number of interrelated shifts which together amount to a distortion of the original text.

First, in considering the question, who participates in the development of Catholic social teaching, a shift occurred from the local Christian community to the magisterium alone. Second, with regard to the starting point, a shift occurred from analysis of the local situation to permanent principles of Catholic social doctrine. Third, in considering the contribution of history, a shift occurred from history as a constitutive dimension of social teaching to an awareness of historical contingencies in the application of social teaching. Fourth, with regard to the place of the gospel, a shift occurred from the gospel as an active partner along with social teaching in dialogue with the signs of the times to the gospel as a primary, distant source of social doctrine. Fifth, the principles of reflection, norms of judgment, and directives for action drawn from social doctrine became the content of social doctrine. Thus the three stages are no longer aspects of a method used by local communities. Sixth, once the principles, norms, and directives became identified with social doctrine, the role of the local Christian community shifted from participation in the actual development of social teaching to mere application of permanently valid principles determined by the magisterium. Seventh, there is consequently a shift from Paul VI's claim that a unified message and a universal solution is neither the papal ambition nor its mission.

<sup>61</sup> "Centesimus annus," *Origins* 21 (1991) 1–24, at 17; Latin text in AAS 83 (1991) 793–867, at 846.

Finally, with regard to the relationship of Church and world, a shift took place from an ecclesiology which saw the Church as a pilgrim people in the world to an ecclesiology of the Church as the guardian of truth which it dispenses to the world. We argue, however, that both of these ecclesiological dimensions are needed as a kind of ongoing self-corrective mechanism. The diminishment of one of them results in the impoverishment of social teaching as a whole.

This study, however, points to more than just one example of papal reinterpretation; it indicates an overall effort to reject or at least minimize historically contextualized methodologies in favor of theologies built on ahistorical truths, universally valid principles, and a suspicion of the material, historical world. This effort may be well intentioned, and it may correct some aspects of historically constituted theologies. At the same time, it implicitly minimizes, or even seems explicitly to discard, much of the scholarly achievement that has become part of the Church's theological heritage in this century.

Such an approach contradicts the reality of social movements and their contribution to social thought in areas stretching from family planning to pacifism to human rights to environmental issues. Participation is essential to human dignity. This connection already has been made in Catholic social teachings in the political and economic arenas, as well as in some social arenas external to the institutional Church. But participation does not characterize the Church's most recent social teaching, which is thus in danger of losing its credibility. To avert this danger, the nonmagisterial contribution to the development of the Church's social teaching must be actively embraced. For in truth of fact, Catholic social teachings are not shaped by the magisterium alone. This reality must be acknowledged and celebrated.

There are inadequacies inherent in the claim of a universal and permanent social doctrine. First, such an approach cannot adequately address the major issues of unity and diversity in human life today. Second, such an option is unable to make sense of change. Third, as long as ahistorical, permanent realities remain the center focus, the power of social, political, religious, and economic structures and movements to shape lives and meaning is downplayed. Finally, an ahistorical approach to Catholic social teaching practically ignores the Incarnation and with that not only history's revelatory possibilities, but a rich world of signs and symbols so central in community formation.

These inadequacies reveal that an ahistorical, unchanging framework for Catholic social teachings is fraught with limitations, whether in terms of providing meaningful principles for action on behalf of justice, or in terms of presenting a method for thinking about key aspects of our era. We suggest that the credibility and integrity of Catholic social teaching requires that it retrieve the fundamental insights sketched in *Gaudium et spes* and elaborated in *Octogesima adveniens*.