Although the Church has always been concerned with social matters, issues of justice, and works of charity–for example, the hospital system we have today originated in and rose out of the monasteries in the west[1]–, it was the Industrial Revolution and the justice issues that stemmed from that period that compelled the Church to develop more systematically her understanding of the moral and social implications of the gospel. And so, the Church's social teaching is relatively new; Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum* marks the starting point of this new development.

Although they are often identified, social justice is very different from personal acts of charity. Political conservatives of the more libertarian variety, many of whom look with suspicion upon Catholic social teaching, will often point to statistics that indicate that conservatives tend to give significantly more to charities, per capita, than their liberal counterparts—implying that institutions of public welfare are not required. Although it may be true that those on the right give more to charities than those on the left, it is beside the point. The reason is that Catholic social teaching seeks to shed light on the responsibilities that the state as a whole has towards its individual members; for there are three different kinds of justice that correspond to the three basic relations that form the structure of life within society, and corresponding to each relation is a kind of debt. First, there is a relation of one individual to another, which is ordered by **commutative justice**; next there is the relation between the person and the social whole, which is ordered by **general or legal justice**, and finally there is the relation between the social whole and the individual person. Catholic social teaching is concerned primarily, if not exclusively, with this latter relation, which is ordered by **distributive justice**.

Governments are established for the sake of meeting this responsibility of establishing the social, environmental, legal and economic conditions that will permit each person to achieve his or her own flourishing or well-being. The sum total of these conditions is what is meant by the **common good** of the civil community. In other words, there are certain duties that belong to society as a whole, the instrument of which is the elected government. Indeed, each person has a duty to contribute, in a way proportioned to his or her abilities and circumstances, to the establishment of those conditions (the details of which belong to a consideration of general or legal justice). But for a society to neglect this responsibility for the common good which belongs to the civil community as a whole, through the instrumentality of an elected government, in favor of leaving it up to the generosity of individuals, is deficient, socially unjust and irresponsible, according to Catholic teaching.

Catholic social teaching has its roots in a very specific theological understanding of the human person. Hence, the reason some people, in particular Marxists at one end and Libertarians at the other, have very different ideas on what the ideal state should look like. As an example, consider what anarcho-capitalist Murray Rothbard writes as a starting point in his *Anatomy of the State*:

> Man is born naked into the world, and needing to use his mind to learn how to take the resources given him by nature, and to transform them (for example, by investment in "capital") into shapes and forms and places where the resources can be used for the satisfaction of his wants and the advancement of his standard of living. The only way by which man can do this is by the use of his mind and energy to transform resources ("production") and to exchange these

[1] See Michel Riquet, S. J. *Christian Charity in Action*. Translated by P. J. Hepburne-Scott. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961.

> products for products created by others. Man has found that, through the process of voluntary, mutual exchange, the productivity and hence, the living standards of all participants in exchange may increase enormously. The only "natural" course for man to survive and to attain wealth, therefore, is by using his mind and energy to engage in the production-and-exchange process. He does this, first, by finding natural resources, and then by transforming them (by "mixing his labor" with them, as Locke puts it), to make them his individual *property*, and then by exchanging this property for the similarly obtained property of others.[2]

What is striking about this starting point is how abstract it is: "Man is born naked in this world and needing to use his mind to learn how to take the resources given him by nature". So much is left out of consideration, and if there is much that is "out of sight", much will be "out of mind". Indeed, man is born naked, but he is born from a mother, and that child has just spent his/her first nine months of life deep within her womb, nurtured and sustained by that mother, placed in her arms immediately after delivery. That child is completely and utterly dependent upon the care of his parents for many years to come, who in turn are dependent upon innumerable others. The human person is more than *homo economicus*; he is first and foremost created by God, in the image and likeness of God. He is the fruit of the love between his own father and mother, and the three of them are an image of the Trinity; for the Person of the Son is eternally generated from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as the Personified love between them. The human person's origin is in love, within the physical interior of a woman, and his destiny is to return to absolute love; but he makes his return through the course of life in the world, for the human person's identity is going to be shaped by the complex network of family and societal relationships and interactions, and above all how he freely chooses to relate to all of this, which establishes his moral identity (character). His greatest need is to be loved and to love, and he will learn to love within that network, if he is properly loved and cared for. He depends upon the gratuitous love of others; for his parents willed him into existence for his own sake, out of the generosity of their love, and nothing will be required of that child for the next few years except to receive that love so as to be able to receive the persons contained in the gifts freely given to him, namely the persons of his mother and father, siblings, relatives, and ultimately God; for it is God who wills all of us into existence and sustains our existence for our sake, and not primarily for the sake of becoming useful and productive instruments of the state. The human person comes from God, and his destiny is to return to God and enter into an eternal communion with Him and the entire communion of saints. His beginning is within the trinity of the family, and his destiny is the Trinity of the Three Divine Persons.

The character and shape of the state ought to be a reflection of this personalism, for the state exists for the sake of individual human persons, to serve them and their families on their journey to that supernatural end. There are two models of government, however, that are inconsistent with the Catholic understanding of the human person and the state's relationship to human persons, namely Individualism/Libertarianism (unregulated capitalism) on the one hand, and Collectivism/Totalitarianism on the other.

Firstly, it should be pointed out that the state is not a single entity with its own unique act of existing, as the totalitarian model of government envisions it. Rather, it is the individual person who is primary, basic, that is, a real being with his own unique act of existence, given by God who is His own Act of Existence. The state is not a substance, but the human person is a substance, a being, a thing, etc. The analogy that is often employed comparing the parts of the state to the parts of the human body is a useful but dangerous one, for it can cause us to overlook the primacy of the

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[2] Murray N. Rothbard. *The Anatomy of the State.* Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, 2009, pp. 13-14.

individual person. We still speak of the organized society as a body politic, but this is nothing more than an analogy, and a very imperfect one at that; for the individual person is not a mere part, but is a whole unto himself, with his own parts that work towards the integrity of the whole (liver, heart, immune system, legs, hands, etc.). The state is in some ways like a human body, and in some ways not like a human body; for example, my toe is not a whole unto itself, but I am a whole unto myself. As such, I am also a part of a family and a part of the civil community as a whole (which is not a substantial whole or single being). The decisions of this body politic are the decisions of individual persons; we consider a majority decision to represent the state as a whole. One nation enters into a free trade agreement with another nation, for example, but this was the decision of a group of individual persons who have been vested with authority, by the people, to act on behalf of the people. There is no "entity" that is the state, at least not in any primary sense; rather, the state is the organized sum of the individual persons (citizens) that make it up. There are no state decisions in the true sense of the word that do not proceed from individual persons. In other words, the state is secondary, a derivative phenomenon, while the person is primary. The government, which is a part of the state, exists for human persons (not vice versa).

The totalitarian model is otherwise. Here the state is regarded as an entity primarily. The members of the state are related to the latter as parts are related to the body. Within this model, the comparison between parts and body is not analogical (i.e., in some ways like, in some ways not like), but univocal (in every way like). Just as you have dominion over your own parts, i.e., your hair, finger and toenails, etc., the state as a single whole has rights over you (a mere part), owns all property and means of production, owns your earnings, and has dominion over your life from conception onwards. In the totalitarian model, your rights are given to you by the state, which can retract those rights as well, for the good of the state as a whole. The individual person has no *inalienable* rights; hence, no rights belonging to the individual are absolute; rather, they are all relative to the "benefit" of the whole.

A single entity like the human body is an organism and thus has a principle of organizational unity (i.e., for Aristotle, that is the substantial form or soul). It is by virtue of that principle that every part of the organism is ordered to the integration of the whole. Anything that is not so ordered or that cannot be so assimilated is disposed of, as in the disposal system in the human body. That is why a true totalitarian state that regards itself as a single entity (body) will brook no dissent; it is necessarily a closed society. There is nothing that is prior to the state to which the state as a whole has certain moral obligations, such as God and the directives of divine and natural law. Free speech, open discussion and debate must be circumscribed within very definite limits, for there is really no "truth" that is outside the grasp of the state government (think of G. W. Hegel, one of the fathers of modern totalitarianism, who from the comfort of his arm chair and without any need to get up and investigate through a gathering of empirical data, regards himself as having a complete grasp of reality, since logical being and real being are identical for the epistemological idealist. In other words, for Hegel, the entire order of reality can be deduced from a single idea, the idea of being). It follows that control is paramount, that is, control of the education system, control of information/media, and control of the economy; in short, control of every part. Moreover, such a state must inevitably expand into an empire, and it does so by incorporating independent parts into itself, as a body metabolizes, or converts food into living tissue.

Although the Church does not put forth any model of government,[3] the Church does reject models that are inconsistent with her principles, and thus she rejects the collectivist model of

[3] "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. For such a task the Church

government; for it is the individual person, created in the image and likeness of God, who is primary and the object of the divine love, and since persons are primary moral agents, the state is governed by the same moral principles that govern persons—there is only one morality, just as there is only one physics, one chemistry, etc. The decisions of the state are decisions of individual persons, and so corrupt states are the result of corrupt persons. In the totalitarian model, on the contrary, there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as corruption, because it is the state (a single entity) and its single will that is the measure of what is true and good or just. It follows that if the state government is not subject to the natural moral law, neither is it subject to civil law; rather, it will regard itself as being above its own laws and constitution.

Hence, the U.S. Catholic bishops assert: "The Church's teaching opposes collectivist and statist economic approaches. But it also rejects the notion that a free market automatically produces justice."[4] And well before that, Pope Leo XIII wrote: "Everybody knows that capitalism has a definite historical meaning as a system, an economic and social system, opposed to "socialism" or "communism". But in the light of the analysis of the fundamental reality of the whole economic process–first and foremost of the production structure that work is–it should be recognized that the error of early capitalism can be repeated wherever man is in a way treated on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument and not in accordance with the true dignity of his work–that is to say, where he is not treated as subject and maker, and for this very reason as the true purpose of the whole process of production."[5] Pope Pius XI also wrote: "There are needs and common goods that cannot be satisfied by the market system. It is the task of the state and of all society to defend them. An idolatry of the market alone cannot do all that should be done."[6] And finally, Pope John Paul II wrote, on the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*:

> ...can it perhaps be said that, after the failure of Communism, capitalism is the victorious social system, and that capitalism should be the goal of the countries now making efforts to rebuild their economy and society? Is this the model which ought to be proposed to the countries of the Third World which are searching for the path to true economic and civil progress?
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> The answer is obviously complex. If by "capitalism" is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative, even though it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of a "business economy", "market economy" or simply "free economy". But if by "capitalism" is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative.

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offers her social teaching as an *indispensable and ideal orientation,* a teaching which, as already mentioned, recognizes the positive value of the market and of enterprise, but which at the same time points out that these need to be oriented towards the common good. This teaching also recognizes the legitimacy of workers' efforts to obtain full respect for their dignity and to gain broader areas of participation in the life of industrial enterprises so that, while cooperating with others and under the direction of others, they can in a certain sense "work for themselves" through the exercise of their intelligence and freedom." CA, §43.

[4] Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy. U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986. §115. https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Economic-Justice-for-All.pdf.

[5] *RN,* § 7.

[6] QA, §40.

> The Marxist solution has failed, but the realities of marginalization and exploitation remain in the world, especially the Third World, as does the reality of human alienation, especially in the more advanced countries. Against these phenomena the Church strongly raises her voice. Vast multitudes are still living in conditions of great material and moral poverty. The collapse of the Communist system in so many countries certainly removes an obstacle to facing these problems in an appropriate and realistic way, but it is not enough to bring about their solution. Indeed, there is a risk that a radical capitalistic ideology could spread which refuses even to consider these problems, in the a priori belief that any attempt to solve them is doomed to failure, and which blindly entrusts their solution to the free development of market forces.[7]

It is very difficult for a nation to maintain a balance between these two extremes. A nation that is responsive to its duties to establish and maintain the conditions for individual human flourishing (the common good), especially a nation that, in view of unforeseeable contingencies that can adversely affect families, has in place proper institutional support systems, can easily begin to drift in the direction of collectivism, and individual citizens of such a nation can begin to relegate all social obligations to the government, thus losing sight of the obligations they have towards the civil community as a whole, and in doing so help create the conditions for an unhealthy state of dependency, that is, a welfare state. Pope John Paul II calls attention to this problem:

> In recent years the range of such intervention has vastly expanded to the point of creating a new type of state, the so-called welfare state. This has happened in some countries in order to respond better to many needs and demands, by remedying forms of poverty and deprivation unworthy of the human person. However, excesses and abuses, especially in recent years, have provoked very harsh criticisms of the welfare state, dubbed the 'social assistance state.' Malfunctions and defects in the social assistance state are the result of an inadequate understanding of the tasks proper to the state.[8]

This brings us to a very important principle of Catholic social teaching, namely, **the principle of subsidiarity**. Regarding this principle, Pope Pius XI wrote: "Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them."[9]

I believe this principle is best defended through a consideration of the limits of human knowledge. Economist Friedrich Hayek underscores a very important and often forgotten datum bearing upon knowledge (Hayek's knowledge problem).[10] In a nutshell, individual knowledge is profoundly limited, but knowledge is widely dispersed throughout society; moreover, it is impossible to concentrate this knowledge into a single planner or bureaucracy; the attempt must fail; for it leads to inefficiency, as socialist economies testify. For example, the knowledge required to efficiently allocate resources throughout a country far exceeds the intellectual capacity of any one individual or central planning committee, far removed as they are from individual communities with their unique

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[7] CA, §42.
[8] CA, §48.
[9] QA, §79.
[10] Friedrich A. Hayek. The Use of Knowledge in Society. Econlib Books, 2018. https://www.econlib.org/library/Essays/hykKnw.html

wants and needs. Instead, prices accomplish this, which of course are rooted in mutually agreed upon transactions, rooted in very specific needs and desires of a myriad of individual persons engaged in a myriad of ever-changing pursuits, too vast for anyone to comprehend in all their details.[11] This principle applies not only to the sphere of economics, but to the educational sphere, among others.[12] The principle of subsidiarity argues for the limits of government intervention for this very reason. Where precisely the borders that limit such intervention are located is very difficult to determine and cannot be known *apriori*, but only known as a result of a great deal of experience, empirical investigation, and an extensive knowledge of history.

There is, however, a flip side of this knowledge problem that just as persuasively argues for institutional support systems; for what also escapes our ability to know and predict with any accuracy are the contingencies that adversely affect the persons and families that make up society: i.e., weather conditions, pandemics, sudden loss of job, the onset of a mental illness or other stress related illnesses, which in turn beget disordered desires, which can lead to disordered decisions, such as excessive consumption of alcohol, which in turn can and often does lead to further imprudent decisions that have serious social repercussions. In the crossfire are innocent children, who cannot process such things, who internalize shame, which in turn plants the seeds for further disorder in the school environment and wider neighborhood, the proper handling of which can be very difficult, exhausting and costly.[13] It is for these reasons, that is, these same cognitive constraints, that institutions on a government level are called for. For the duty to support fellow citizens in serious crisis, a social duty rooted in human solidarity, belongs to society as a whole, not just to certain individuals within their neighborhood. Some people, through no fault of their own, have a disposition to a mental illness, for example, that can be triggered by a stressor, seriously incapacitating them, making it almost impossible for them to meet their responsibilities towards their families, etc. As Pope John XXIII points out, such persons "have the right to be looked after in the event of ill health".[14]

In the Hebrew scriptures, the first story of creation, in depicting the creation of the universe in stages beginning with time, then space, a foundation (land) and the furnishings (creatures), reveals that creation is a "household", more specifically "my father's house", which is the Hebrew term for "family". If creation is a household (family), so too is society, which in turn is made up of smaller households. This point of view is not socialism–for it does not acknowledge the human person as the primary moral agent, nor does it recognize the duty of the state towards the natural moral law

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[11] "How an incredibly complex, high-tech economy can operate without any central direction is baffling to many. The last President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, is said to have asked British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher: How do you see to it that people get food? The answer was that she didn't. Prices did that. Moreover, the British people were better fed than people in the Soviet Union, even though the British have not produced enough food to feed themselves in more than a century. Prices bring them food from other countries.

Without the role of prices, imagine what a monumental bureaucracy it would take to see to it that the city of London alone is supplied with the tons of food, of every variety, which it consumes every day. Yet such an army of bureaucrats can be dispensed with—and the people that would be needed in such a bureaucracy can do productive work elsewhere in the economy—because the simple mechanism of prices does the same job faster, cheaper, and better." Thomas Sowell, *Basic Economics*. New York: Basic Books, 2011, p. 12.

[12] See Kevin Currie-Knight. "Education, Decentralization, and the Knowledge Problem: A Hayekian Case for Decentralized Education". *Philosophical Studies in Education.* 2012, Volume 43, pp. 117-127.

[13] "When a child first catches adults out–when it first walks into his grave little head that adults do not have divine intelligence, that their judgments are not always wise, their thinking true, their sentences just–his world falls into panic and desolation. The gods are fallen and all safety gone. And there is one sure thing about the fall of gods: they do not fall a little; they crash and shatter or sink deeply into green muck. It is a tedious job to build them up again; they never quite shine. And the child's world is never quite whole again. It is an aching kind of growing". John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*. 3, 2.

[14] PT, §11.

and the law of God; rather, the state is divine. In a household, however, a certain attitude should prevail: as a result of an awareness of a special family solidarity, it becomes evident that everyone should look after one another—one of the effects of Original Sin is the lying and murderous attitude that asks: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gn 4, 9). What this implies precisely becomes increasingly complex as we move from the level of general principles to the level of the concrete particular, but the household exists for the good of the family members (there is a common good of the household). No one is simply left on their own to fend for themselves without the help of the whole unit. The heads of the family enjoy an authority that stems from their basic obligation to the common good of that first and smaller society, the family; similarly, the heads of state enjoy an authority that is rooted as well in their special obligation to the common good of the civil community as a whole, and that common good must be loved more than their own private good. Corruption occurs when heads of state begin to use their power for the sake of their private good, that is, when they subordinate the common good of the whole to their own private good. Pope John Paul II writes:

> Economic activity, especially the activity of a market economy, cannot be conducted in an institutional, juridical or political vacuum. On the contrary, it presupposes sure guarantees of individual freedom and private property, as well as a stable currency and efficient public services. Hence the principal task of the State is to guarantee this security, so that those who work and produce can enjoy the fruits of their labours and thus feel encouraged to work efficiently and honestly. The absence of stability, together with the corruption of public officials and the spread of improper sources of growing rich and of easy profits deriving from illegal or purely speculative activities, constitutes one of the chief obstacles to development and to the economic order.[15]

This brings us to the question of **private property**. The question of the right to private property, in the mind of the Church, is always looked upon in the light of the **principle of the universal destination of material goods**. This principle asserts that the material goods of this world, created by God, are destined for the benefit of everyone, not just the few (such as the owners of the means of production, land owners, the wealthy elite, etc.). Property must be arranged in such a way as to ensure that everyone benefits from the material goods of this world.

We speak of rights, i.e., to ownership, to the goods of this world, etc., but rights are nothing more than the flip side of obligations, and obligations are fundamental moral principles. For example, a person's right to life is really nothing more than everyone else's obligation not to kill him. If no one had an obligation not to kill him, he could not be said to possess a right to life–i.e., fish do not have a "right to life". My right not to be lied to is really nothing other than your obligation to speak truthfully. Catholic social teaching never mentions rights without mentioning the obligations or duties behind those rights. We see this most clearly in Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*:

> The natural rights of which We have so far been speaking are inextricably bound up with as many duties, all applying to one and the same person. These rights and duties derive their origin, their sustenance, and their indestructibility from the natural law, which in conferring the one imposes the other. Thus, for example, the right to live involves the duty to preserve one's life; the right to a decent standard of living, the duty to live in a becoming fashion; the right to be free to seek out the truth, the duty to devote oneself to an ever deeper and wider search for it.[16]

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[15] CA, §48.
[16] PT, §28-29.

Today, however, it is common to speak of rights without any reference to the obligations behind those rights. Moreover, rights discourse tends to be limited to the rights of individuals. However, the civil community as a whole has rights, and these rights are rooted in the obligations of individual persons towards the common good of the civil community as a whole: i.e., the civil community has a right to expect that individual persons do their part in establishing the social conditions for human well-being, obey the law, pursue integrity, etc. I, as a member of the state, have an obligation to pursue basic intelligible human goods, that is, to preserve my life, to seek knowledge, to develop my appreciation for beauty and the skills that I may possess in order to create it, to cultivate friendships, to love others for their sake, not merely for the sake of what they do for me, to obey the law and pursue the common good, to seek harmony between myself and God, that is, to worship God in a spirit of gratitude, to pursue moral integrity, and to live a generous existence that bears fruit in some way, either through the pursuit of marriage and the family, or through some other vocation. If these obligations are mine, then I have a right to the means necessary to fulfill these obligations. Hence, the civil community as a whole, through its elected government, has an obligation to work to establish and maintain the conditions that will permit me and other persons to realize those duties.

The right to ownership is thus not absolute, but is circumscribed by the rights and obligations of persons. In short, it is a right that is subordinated to the principle of the universal destination of material goods. As was said, the human person has a fundamental moral obligation to direct his life towards the common good of the civil community as a whole; for his fundamental need is to love and be loved, and it is through love that he expands as a person. My own happiness, which I am obliged to pursue, cannot be had without the self-expansion that occurs through the free decision to love others for their sake, not for the sake of what they do for me. Selfishness destroys me. But I cannot love others unless I respond to my duty to preserve my own physical and mental health, among other things. I am part of this creation, which is a household (my father's house), and the material goods of this world which constitute part of this household exist for the benefit of my siblings, which is everyone. The government that is established to maintain the conditions that permit everyone to flourish has the task of finding the best means, the most effective and efficient means of realizing that end. This end, however, will be achieved, on a basic level, only through the labor of individual persons who are pursuing their own integrity, which includes preserving their own life, the lives of their family, and working for the common good. It is at this junction that the right to ownership arises, for the product of his labor is his own–albeit ordered to the good of his immediate family and ultimately to the good of society. Pope John Paul II writes:

> The original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and man, and who gave the earth to man so that he might have dominion over it by his work and enjoy its fruits (Gen 1:28). God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone. This is *the foundation of the universal destination of the earth's goods*. The earth, by reason of its fruitfulness and its capacity to satisfy human needs, is God's first gift for the sustenance of human life. But the earth does not yield its fruits without a particular human response to God's gift, that is to say, without work. It is through work that man, using his intelligence and exercising his freedom, succeeds in dominating the earth and making it a fitting home. In this way, he makes part of the earth his own, precisely the part which he has acquired through work; this is *the origin of individual property*. Obviously, he also has the responsibility not to hinder others from having their own part of God's gift; indeed, he must cooperate with others so that together all can dominate the earth.[17]

[17] CA, §31.

In other words, property has a social purpose. The right to own is rooted in this social purpose. Pope Francis writes:

> For my part, I would observe that "the Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property". The principle of the common use of created goods is the "first principle of the whole ethical and social order"; it is a natural and inherent right that takes priority over others. All other rights having to do with the goods necessary for the integral fulfilment of persons, including that of private property or any other type of property, should – in the words of Saint Paul VI – "in no way hinder [this right], but should actively facilitate its implementation". The right to private property can only be considered a secondary natural right, derived from the principle of the universal destination of created goods. This has concrete consequences that ought to be reflected in the workings of society. Yet it often happens that secondary rights displace primary and overriding rights, in practice making them irrelevant.[18]

Many libertarians speak of private property without any explicit qualification of that right, which lends the impression that it is an absolute and primary natural right. St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest Doctors of the Church, also maintains that the use of exterior things should be common, not proper. What this means is that "exterior things should be used by those having discretion over them not only for their private advantage but for the benefit of others as well."[19] Ownership, or appropriation to some persons, of exterior things is necessary in order to fulfill the requirement of common use. St. Thomas provides three reasons why this is so.

> First because every man is more careful to procure what is for himself alone than that which is common to many or to all: since each one would shirk the labor and leave to another that which concerns the community…. Secondly, because human affairs are conducted in more orderly fashion if each man is charged with taking care of some particular thing himself, whereas there would be confusion if everyone had to look after any one thing indeterminately. Thirdly, because a more peaceful state is ensured to man if each one is contented with his own. Hence it is to be observed that quarrels arise more frequently where there is no division of the things possessed.[20]

This is what it means to say that private property is subordinate to a higher principle (the principle of the universal destination of material goods, that is, the principle of common use). When this is not the case, a government has the right and duty to intervene in order to establish an arrangement that will achieve the ends of a just society. Joseph Boyle writes:

> ...the deliberate effort of political authority to design ownership relationships so as to fulfill the requirements of common use is the simple duty of political leaders, and the intervention of political authority to rectify gross negligence of owners in carrying out their responsibilities of ownership is not robbery but the justified enforcing of moral obligations which owners already have, prior to any consideration of state power. The state's intervention is thus, ideally at least, a

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[18] FT, §120.

[19] Joseph Boyle. "Natural law, ownership and the world's natural resources". *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 23, 1989, p. 193. See *ST*. II-II, 66, 2, ad 2, ad 3; 66, 7; 32, 5, ad 2.

[20] *ST*. II-II, 66, 2

form of subsidiarity, of helping people fulfill the obligations of distributive justice already contained in their ownership of goods.[21]

It is certainly the case that much more can be drawn out of these general principles which would allow us to comment meaningfully on other issues of social justice, i.e., the obligations between nations, especially the relationship between poorer nations and the rich nations of the north, the nature of work and the question of wages and working conditions, the right to unionize, the responsibilities of unions, etc. The papal encyclicals of the past one hundred years do just that, which is why it is so important to read them. But of course, they do not cover these topics exhaustively. The Church's social teaching will continue to develop and expand as a result of continued reflection on these principles and our own experience in their light. There is a great deal, however, that the Church cannot pronounce on; for the Church limits herself to the level of general principles and their logical implications, but after a certain point, we enter into the realm of the sciences, i.e., political science, the science of economics, climate science, finance and law, etc. The details and particularities of these highly complex sciences are to be worked out by the laity on the basis of reason, experience, empirical data, debate and dialogue, which is outside the sphere of the Church's authority. Pope Leo XIII writes: "If I were to pronounce on any single matter of a prevailing economic problem, I should be interfering with the freedom of men to work out their own affairs. Certain cases must be solved in the domain of facts, case by case as they occur…. Men must realize in deeds those things, the principles of which have been placed beyond dispute…These things one must leave to the solution of time and experience."[22]

Finally, we need to keep careful watch over the myriad ways in which we are capable of deceiving ourselves. We tend to embrace some aspects of Catholic teaching while ignoring others, depending on our political and economic slant. Some presentations of Catholic social teaching are very often little more than Marxism in gospel garb; other presentations simply focus on those aspects of Catholic social teaching that corroborate the presenter's libertarian slant. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops have addressed this very point. We read:

> Some in our own community welcome the tradition's teaching on private property, the limits of the state, the advantages of free markets and the condemnation of communism, but resist the focus on the poor, the defense of labor unions, the recognition of the moral limits of markets and the responsibilities of government. Others welcome the teaching on the "option for the poor," the duties of government to protect the weak, the warnings against unbridled capitalism, but seem to ignore the centrality of family, the emphasis on economic initiative, and the warnings against the bureaucratic excesses of a "social assistance" state. Our social tradition is a moral framework… It challenges both right and left, labor and management to focus on the dignity of the human person and the common good rather than their own political or economic interests.[23]

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[21] Joseph Boyle. "Natural law, ownership and the world's natural resources". *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 23, 1989, p. 199.

[22] Quoted in Katherine Burton, *Leo the Thirteenth: The First Modern Pope*. New York: David McKay Co., 1962, p. 171.

[23] National Conference of Catholic Bishops. A Decade after Economic Justice for All: Continuing Principles, Changing Context, New Challenges. 1995.