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Democracy in the Teaching of the Popes

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DEMOCRACY IN THE TEACHING OF THE POPES

PRELIMINARY REPORT *

MICHEL SCHOOPYANS

Une grande révolution démocratique s'opère parmi nous; tous la voient, mais tous ne la jugent point de la même manière. Les uns la considèrent comme une chose nouvelle, et, la prenant pour un accident, ils espèrent pouvoir encore l'arrêter, tandis que d'autres la jugent irrésistible, parce qu'elle leur semble le fait le plus continu, le plus ancien et le plus permanent que l'on connaisse dans l'histoire.

TOCQUEVILLE

INTRODUCTION

The magisterium of the Church was slow to speak about democracy, and did so even then with considerable circumspection, if not suspicion. It would in fact not be hard to dig up some embarrassing statements, using them as grounds for handing the pastors over to the court of history and convicting them of obstructing the march of humanity toward a glorious future. However, we shall let others feast on such delicacies, preferring to concentrate our time and attention on the *positive* contribution the magisterium has made to reflection on democracy. This reflection started at the end of the 19th century under the inspiration of Leo XIII, and it should be stressed that the way was paved by the activities of Catholics involved in

* This text started life in the form of a *dossier* requested by the Academy as a starting point for its work programme on democracy, and was then amended and refined on the basis of numerous observations and suggestions made in the course of work sessions. Like the original text, the present version has also had the benefit of precious advice from Canon Roger Aubert, Emeritus Professor at the University of Louvain. It is thus the result of collegial work, and the author is most appreciative of all those who have contributed.

the social struggles of the times as much as by the body of Christian social teaching. As has often been the case, the Church showed an openness first to *social* democracy, which can be summed up in the formula "Everything for the people", and only later to *political* democracy, which can be summed up in the formula "Everything for the people and by the people".

With a view to studying democracy, the Academy asked us to produce a background survey dealing with the teaching of the Church on this question. However, we felt it would be best to start by tracing the broad outlines of the whole question of democracy, in order to provide a solid basis for our consideration of the approach of the Church to this complex issue. And here we chose to adopt a less institutional or juridical and more political-philosophical perspective. This helps us to understand papal teaching on the issue from Leo XIII to John Paul II, which will form the central part of our report. In the third and final part, we shall suggest various directions in which we could advance Christian reflection on the question.

Chapter I

DEMOCRACY IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Speaking very generally, democracy is a political organization with which the sovereign people, i.e. the collectivity of citizens, provides itself. This organization displays a variety of features, but is based on certain foundations and has certain aims.

I. FEATURES

1. The sovereign people *constitutes* its governors.
2. Power proceeds from the sovereign people; it is *divided* into legislative, executive and judicial powers.
3. The people organize themselves into a *political body* and choose *representatives* through universal suffrage. These representatives debate, reflect and decide by a majority vote.
4. These features have direct effects on *political regimes* and *institutions*:
 - (a) since Aristotle, a distinction has been made between monarchy, aristocracy and constitutional republic (πολιτεία—corresponding to our democracy), which may be corrupted respectively into tyranny, oligarchy and democracy (corresponding to our demagogy); this typology has been repeated many times in the course of history;
 - (b) we would recall that Athenian democracy accepted slavery, as did western societies for a long time.

II. FOUNDATION

1. Democracy is generally based on *human rights*, which are often recognized in solemn declarations and/or summarized in constitutional texts.
2. These rights encompass the right to *life*, to *freedom* of thought, expression, movement and association, to *property*, to establish a family, etc.
3. Democracy accepts certain *limits* on personal freedom: the freedom of others must be respected, and public order maintained.
4. Democracy gives special regard to *equality* between people. However, equality does not mean identity: people are all different in many ways. Equality means that the *universality* of men and women have the same dignity by virtue of their membership of the human species.
5. The demands of democracy extend beyond civil and political rights, also giving rise to *economic, social and cultural rights*. Political democracy seeks to reduce differences, by organizing social protection for the weakest.
6. In democracy, these rights have the value of *rules* which constrain citizens and institutions, governed and governors. A democratic state is based on the *rule of law*.

III. AIMS

1. Democracy can be recognized by the search for the *common good*. It is opposed to privilege, and seeks to create conditions that will foster each person's personal growth. Authority is legitimate only if it is at the service of the common good.
2. Democracy seeks to provide itself with *good* laws, in other words laws that respect and ensure respect for the equal dignity of all citizens, their life, their freedom, etc.
3. Democracy does not confine itself to acknowledging and promoting human rights, but seeks to bring about the *participation* of all people in all spheres of the life of society—participation in the twofold sense of sharing in the benefits and drawbacks offered by society, and making a personal contribution to building up the common good. The principle of *subsidiarity* summarizes this aspect.
4. Democracy seeks to bring about the rule of *justice* in society: commutative, distributive, social justice.

IV. DISCUSSIONS ON DEMOCRACY

Each of the features we have just listed can be emphasized in a variety of ways. In addition, each one is closely bound up with all the others. So it is hardly surprising that democracy has been the object of many discussions for a long time now. Let us mention some of these here.

1. What is the meaning of *sovereignty*? Absolute power? Supreme power within a given order (cf. Bodin, Maritain)?
2. The *sovereignty* of States is being increasingly *curbed*, in practice and in law, by international institutions. The *specific legislation* of individual States is often subordinated to or modified by treaties, conventions or agreements obtained by "consensus"—which replaces custom as the source of law. What effect does this have on the democratic systems of the States concerned?
3. What is the *origin of power*? Is it ultimately based in God? In human social nature (cf. Aristotle)? In a contract (cf. Althusius) or a pact (cf. Hobbes)? In human nature (cf. Locke)? In the people (cf. Rousseau)? In the nation (cf. Sieyès)? In strength (cf. C. Schmitt)?
4. What is the *basis of human rights*? "Natural law" understood as that part of the eternal law—expression of divine *ratio*—concerning man (cf. the Thomists)? "Natural law" derived from study of the nature of man seen as a social being (cf. Grotius)? Are these "human rights" not simply a part of ethics? Are they persuasive? Or coercive? Is there a metajuridical order (cf. Kelsen)?
5. Which *values* does democracy support or endanger?
6. What is the *role of the democratic State*? Should we follow the *minimalists* (the liberal tradition), who see reduction of the State's role as a guarantee of freedom? Or the *maximalists* (the socialist tradition), who see expansion of the State's role as a guarantee of equality? Is democracy to be located mid-way between anarchy and despotism (cf. Tocqueville)?
7. In what way are parliamentary assemblies *representative*? What is the role of parties? Lobbies? The media?
8. Does democracy imply *tolerance*? Civil tolerance? Doctrinal tolerance? Is justice the outcome of a process of consensus (cf. Rawls)? Can a democratic society tolerate anything, no matter what? What criteria should be used in fixing limits? Are there limits to pluralism? Is a *majority* enough to legitimize anything, no matter what?
9. In some spheres, there is a risk that *responsibility will be transferred* from law-makers to experts—an especially real prospect in the sphere of biomedical sciences.

10. In more general terms, there are a number of indicators that democracy is being eroded, and some people understandably warn against the rise of a new oligarchy, condemning the *tyranny of technocracy* which is its expression.
11. How is it possible that even today some Church authorities still “excuse” or even support undemocratic governments on the grounds that they defend certain values?
12. Why, in the Church, have the grassroots opened up to democracy sooner than the hierarchy has? And why is a similar tendency still sometimes seen even today?

Chapter II

PAPAL TEACHING ON DEMOCRACY

A full examination of the teaching of the Church on democracy would require study of the involvement of lay people and/or priests who have fought for social and then political democracy, albeit without formulating the theory. We would have to mention such figures as Buchez, Lamennais, Toniolo, Fathers Lennie, Naudet, Taparelli d'Azeglio, Liberatore, Romolo Murri and Luigi Sturzo (whom we shall be referring to again below). We would have to study the origin and action of Christian democratic parties—the Belgian Catholic Party, the Dutch Catholic Party, the German Zentrum Party, the Italian Popular Party, the Czechoslovakian Populist Catholic Party, etc.

Closer to our own times, we would have to recall the influence of philosophers such as Maritain, Mounier and Jacques Leclercq, and the activity of Marc Sangnier, De Gasperi,¹ Robert Schuman, Adenauer, and de Gaulle. We would have to assess the political impact of the positions taken up by Archbishop John Ireland of St Paul, Cardinal Gibbons in Baltimore and Cardinal Manning in London, or, more recently still, Cardinal Cardijn in many parts of the world.

However, the framework of the present study ruled out any idea of venturing into such a vast and complex field, and we simply confined ourselves to examining the teaching of contemporary popes.²

¹ On the post-war period, see J.-D. DURAND, “L'Eglise catholique et la démocratie politique en Italie au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale”, in A. DIERKENS (ed.), *Le libéralisme religieux* (Brussels: Université de Bruxelles, 1992), pp. 77-93.

² We learned of the work of Antonio ACERBI, *Chiesa e democrazia da Leone XIII al Vaticano II* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1992) too late to take it into account in the present study.

I. A BELATED REFLECTION

When we start looking for official texts on democracy, it quickly becomes apparent that such writings are all relatively recent.³ And this gives rise to the unavoidable question of why it took so long for this reflection to appear in Catholic circles. The main reason lies in disputes that have been going on between Society and Church since the 16th century. These disputes can be summarized under a number of headings:

1. *The Reformation* is seen as a movement that "completely overturned the two powers, spiritual and temporal; sudden turmoil, bold revolutions ... were the outcome" (Leo XIII, *Diuturnum illud*).
2. The Reformation—this *heresy*—leads to the *enlightenment*, "the false philosophy, and what is called modern law and sovereignty of the people, and this unbridled licence ... From that point, people moved on to the most recent errors: *communism, socialism and nihilism*" (*ibid.*). What is being rejected here is that "free-examinism" that sets up man as the ultimate criterion of what is true and good.
3. The *French Revolution* and the violence so typical of it are seen as the practical outcome of the undermining ideas debated in the 18th century in *sociétés de pensée* and secret societies. It placed the clergy under civil law, gave power exclusively to the Nation, and tried to set up a lay religion.
4. There are also the *excesses of certain liberal and socialist currents*, so frequently criticized by popes and bishops, even in socially and politically open environments. The very word "democracy" has often been lent a distinctly pejorative connotation.
5. Above all, we cannot forget the weight of St Paul's famous phrase, *Omnis potestas a Deo* (Rom 13:1). This phrase was of course used over the centuries as justification for the divine right of kings, and it would have taken a very bold man to interpret it in anything other than the traditionally accepted manner. Anything that smacked of doctrines such as that of Sieyès (1748-1836) on national sovereignty was seen as suspect.
6. A more *epistemological* explanation should be added to these various historical and doctrinal explanations. The 19th-century Church did not

³ A major survey of existing documents will be found in the volume produced by the International Union of Social Studies, founded at Malines in 1920 by Cardinal Mercier: *La hiérarchie catholique et la problème social depuis l'encyclique "Rerum Novarum". 1891-1931. Répertoire bibliographique des documents émanés des souverains pontifes et de l'épiscopat* (Paris: Spes, 1921). Most of the documents listed focus on *social* democracy, although many also concern political democracy.

equip itself early enough with analytical tools that would have allowed it to analyze and understand better the emergence of the phenomenon of democracy and its novelty. It continued to use the philosophical and political analytical tools inherited from 16th-century scholasticism in order to judge the new democratic trends. Although scholasticism certainly had its merits, it was under the sway of the concept of the divine right of kings and an absolute monarchy—the dominant model at the time. However, it could also have drawn on the new methods of political analysis already *practised* by Machiavelli (*horresco referens!*) and Montesquieu, which Tocqueville would use so effectively.

Under these circumstances it was inevitable that Churchmen should have cherished many prejudices at the moment when democracy was starting to become established with an irresistible force as the undisputed ideal of any modern society.⁴

II. LEO XIII, THE INITIATOR

Initially, we find Leo XIII (1810-1878-1903) vigorously condemning “novelties”, which require strict discernment:

This pernicious and deplorable taste for novelties which arose in the 16th century first overturned the Christian religion and ... soon spread to philosophy, and from philosophy to all aspects of society (*Immortale Dei* [1885]).

After this, the pope lists and condemns several of the most radical political theses produced by the Reformation and Enlightenment. He refuses to see the will of the people as the sole basis of public authority, and requires that the exercise of power be referred to the sovereignty of God.

In a society based on these principles, public authority is simply the will of the people, and inasmuch as the people depends only on itself, it is also only answerable to itself. It chooses its authorized representatives, but in such a way that it delegates to them not so much the right as the use or function of power, which they exercise in its name. No mention is made of God's sovereignty, exactly as if God did not exist (*ibid.*).

⁴ On the period to be studied here, the reader is referred to the works of Roger AUBERT, “Les grands thèmes de l'enseignement social des papes de Léon XIII à Paul VI”, in *La Foi et le Temps* (Brussels), vol. XXIII (1992-1993), pp. 242-279; and “Le christianisme social”, in *Actes du XIII^e Congrès international des Sciences historiques, Moscou, 16-23 août 1970* (Moscow: Nauka, Direction de la littérature orientale, 1970). Both articles also contain references to the best existing studies on the history of the social teaching of the Church.

The allusion to Rousseau's idea of the "general will" and Sieyès's idea of the rule of the electorate is at once expanded on:

It can hence be seen that the State is simply the multitude as master and governor of itself; and once the people are seen as the source of all law and power, it follows that the State does not see itself as having any duty to God (*ibid.*).

Just as the most radical and secularizing theories on *sovereignty* are condemned, the most radical theories on *law* are also rejected. Once the law has rejected reference to God, it sanctions the unbridled exercise of freedom. Man becomes the measure of all things. In practice or theory, when man denies his condition as creature, he ends up by formulating a law in keeping with the total autonomy he is claiming. On this point, Grotius opened the way for Feuerbach.

This is the source [going back to the 16th century] from which we must trace these principles of unbridled freedom which were dreamed up and promulgated in the midst of the great upheavals of the last century, as the principles and foundations of a *new* and hitherto unknown *law*, which was in conflict not only with Christian law, but also with natural law on a number of points (*ibid.*).

Leo XIII does not confine himself to giving these doctrinal orientations, but first and foremost frees up the situation created by the fundamentalist interpretation of the Pauline aphorism *Omnis potestas a Deo*. While of course still holding that power has its *origin* in God, he adds that there can be considerable human participation in the *exercise* of power. He also develops two related points, stating first that the Church is in principle neutral with respect to types of government, neither approving nor disapproving any particular political system:

... there is nothing to prevent the Church from approving government by one or by several, so long as the government be just and seek the common good. Also, always preserving acquired rights, peoples are in no way forbidden to adopt the political form best suited to their own spirit or their own traditions and customs (*Diuturnum illud* [1881]).

Four years later, after setting out "the rules drawn up by the Catholic Church regarding the constitution and government of States", he repeats that:

When considered rationally, these principles and decrees do not in themselves disapprove of any of the various forms of government, so long as they contain nothing contrary to Catholic doctrine and are exercised with wisdom and justice; they can all ensure public prosperity (*Immortale Dei*).

With varying nuances, this suspension of judgment on types of government and their designation regularly recurs right up to John XXIII:

It is impossible to determine, once and for all, what is the most suitable form of government, or how civil authorities can most effectively fulfil their respective functions, i.e., the legislative, judicial and executive functions of the State (*Pacem in terris* [1963], 67).

In selecting a regime or government, Catholics will thus be very attentive to doctrinal guidelines. However, they will also take account of the specific circumstances in which they can and must show responsible freedom. This is what Leo XIII recommended to French Catholics in 1892:

Various political systems have succeeded one another in France during this century, each with its distinctive form: empires, monarchies and republics. Confining oneself to abstractions, one could define which is the best of these forms, considered in themselves; one could equally in all truth declare that each of them is good, provided that it is able to move undeviatingly toward its goal—the common good—for which social authority exists. Finally, it should be added that from a relative point of view, one form of government may be preferable to another, being better adapted to the character and customs of one or another nation. In this speculative sphere, Catholics, like any citizen, are completely free to prefer one form of government to another (*Immortale Dei*).

Despite this wish to keep an equal distance from the three major kinds of system, on several occasions the pope gives cautious but clear expression to his openness to democratic regimes. For example, on the designation of governments he states:

... when designating those who are to govern the State, this appointment can in certain cases be left to the choice and preference of the majority, without any objection from Catholic doctrine. This choice decides who will be sovereign, but does not confer the rights of sovereignty. The authority is not constituted; rather, it is decided who will exercise it (*Diuturnum illud*).

Eight years later, the same view is repeated, accompanied now by the principle of moral neutrality:

Preference for a State constitution tempered by an element of democracy is not in itself contrary to duty, provided always that Catholic doctrine on the origin and exercise of public power be respected. The Church does not reject any of the various forms of government, provided that they be in themselves capable of assuring the good of the citizens (*Libertas praestantissimum* [1888]).

However, several years earlier Leo XIII had spoken favourably of what we would today call participation:

There is nothing as such against the people's playing a part in government to some degree; indeed, at certain times and under certain laws, this could be not only an advantage but a duty for citizens (*Immortale Dei*).

Rerum novarum has a special place in Leo XIII's teaching on democracy, for here the pope touches on three essential points. First he emphasizes that the poor and workers are full citizens. He then moves on to the idea of *universality*, an essential for any democracy.

Non-owning workers are unquestionably citizens by nature in virtue of the same right as the rich, that is, true and vital parts whence, through the medium of families, the body of the State is constituted; and it hardly need be added that they are by far the greatest number in every urban area. Since it would be quite absurd to look out for one portion of the citizens and neglect another, it follows that public authority ought to exercise due care in safe-guarding the well-being and the interests of non-owning workers. Unless this is done, justice, which commands that everyone be given his own, will be violated (*Rerum novarum* [1891], 49).

He next confirms the *right of association*, which was rejected by the French revolution, under which the suppression of traditional corporations left the working class with no protection. Finally he confirms the need for *State intervention* in order to protect workers and develop more just social programmes.

Leo XIII returned to several of these themes in 1901 in *Graves in communi*: the moral neutrality of various types of government, the need for Christians to act for the good of the people, respect for the legitimate authority of the State, etc. This document consecrated to "Christian democracy" does in fact mark a certain retreat from the positions of the great texts of earlier years, particularly *Rerum novarum*. Although the 1901 encyclical clearly recognizes the validity of the expression "Christian democracy", it understands it solely in the social sense of relieving people's suffering, and thus denies democracy any political relevance.

Leo XIII's position as the initiator of Christian reflection on democracy rests on the emphasis placed on certain themes: rejection of a trend that leads to civil religion and would end in contemporary totalitarianism; abstention from qualitative judgment on the various traditional forms of government; participation, association, universality, responsible freedom, and the role of the State.

III. FROM PIUS X TO PIUS XI

1. Absorbed as he was with other concerns, St Pius X (1835-1903-1914) echoed his predecessor's statements, especially in his letter *Notre charge* to

the French bishops in 1910. This letter criticized Marc Sangnier's view of democracy, particularly as concerns the people as origin of sovereignty. It is consistent with the rest of Pius X's teaching, for many of his writings on social and political matters mark a step backwards from the teaching of Leo XIII, and he was at one point on the verge of condemning unionism, even Christian—which is a form of social democracy. He had been influenced by the Hapsburg political model, which had held sway in Venice for a long time. (Venice had been under the absolute rule of Austria for many years, and became Italian only in 1866, after the Battle of Sadowa).

2. When Benedict XV (1854-1914-1922) outlined "the basic principles on which the future reorganization of peoples must be based", he started a process that Pius XII would later take up in 1942 and 1944. Drawing on Victoria, although the pope's thinking is focused on international relations, two principles are invoked in this context that will later be incorporated into the teaching on democracy. In this way Benedict XV suggests the need to extend the democratic spirit to relations between peoples:

The fundamental point must be that the material force of arms be replaced by the moral force of law ... Once the supremacy of law ... is established, every obstacle to communication between peoples must be lifted, ensuring ... true freedom and communion across oceans ... (*Dès le début* [1917]).

Benedict XV also supported Don Luigi Sturzo (1871-1951), who founded the Popular Party in 1919, drawing his inspiration from the Christian social teaching then available.

3. Although Pius XI (1857-1922-1939) was most attentive to the political and social problems of his time, his direct contribution to our subject is not particularly original or rich. However, his indirect contribution is considerable, and the texts on *Action française*—condemned by him in 1926—deserve exploration. He also condemned the totalitarian regimes emerging from the turmoil of socialist and liberal ideologies—for example in *Non abbiamo bisogno* (1931), *Mit brennender Sorge* (1937) and *Divini redemptoris* (1937).

In an attempt to humour Mussolini, in 1923 Pius XI withdrew the support that Benedict XV had given to Don Sturzo. The Italian Popular Party split into two groups, with Don Sturzo's faction, the larger group, being opposed to fascism, while the other group, to which the pope was more sympathetic, was prepared to offer it some support. In practical terms, the Church would benefit from fascism, as is seen in the signature of the Lateran Pacts in 1929, and Pius XI would not really take a stand against fascism until 1936 and the signature of the friendship agreement between Italy and Germany.

IV. PIUS XII

We have to wait until Pius XII (1876-1939-1958) for the formulation of papal teaching that deals explicitly with democracy. His 1944 Christmas radio message, *Benignitas*, is totally devoted to the topic. World War II was not yet over, and Pius XII drew two lessons from that tragic experience.

The Lessons of the War

On the one hand, he observes that the war has awakened a sense of political responsibility in people, and also an aspiration for all citizens to participate more fully in politics.

Gripped in the grim light of war, ... peoples have awakened as if from a long slumber. They have taken up a new stance toward the State and governments, questioning, criticizing and mistrusting them. Educated through bitter experience, they view the monopoly of dictatorial, uncontrollable and intangible power with mounting repugnance and rejection. They demand a system of government more compatible with the dignity and freedom of citizens (*Benignitas* [1944]).

On the other hand, Pius XII points out that had there been adequate means of control, the world conflict could have been avoided. As Benedict XV did before him, and as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) will do four years later, *Benignitas* therefore seeks to contribute to the prevention of new conflicts and the building up of a lasting peace.

These anxious multitudes ... are today convinced ... that had the possibility of controlling and correcting the activities of the public authorities not been missed, the world would not have been plunged into the devastating turmoil of war, and that if another such catastrophe is to be prevented in the future, it is vital to create effective guarantees among the people themselves (*ibid.*).

These instruments of control will be especially necessary to check the exorbitant claims of the State to absolute power. In the spirit of Tocqueville, Pius XII rejects a democracy in which the power of the "sovereign" is perverted into despotism; he also rejects a juridical positivism that would derive law solely from the will of the State.

A healthy democracy ... will be resolutely opposed to the corruption that grants the State legislature unfettered and boundless power and that turns a democratic form of government into a system of pure and simple absolutism, despite contrary but illusory appearances (*ibid.*).

Here Pius XII distinguishes between absolute monarchy, which he does not reject on principle, and State absolutism, which he rejects, and which was exemplified by the Nazi State.

State absolutism (not to be confused as such with absolute monarchy, which is not under discussion here) consists in the erroneous principle that the authority of the State is unlimited and that, even when it gives free reign to its despotic designs, overstepping the limits of good and evil, no appeal can be made against the State to a higher, compelling law of conscience (*ibid.*).

Pius XII refers to the distinction that Bossuet had already established between absolute and arbitrary power, and also applies the principle of moral neutrality, recalling its terms. Citing Leo XIII, he confirms *epokhē*, the abstention of the magisterium from judging between different forms of government. However, he observes that the war has strengthened the aspiration of citizens for more collaboration, more freedom—in short, more democracy.

In the presence of such attitudes, is it surprising if the trend to democracy spreads ever more widely among peoples and wins broad support and consent from those wishing to collaborate more effectively in the destiny of individuals and society? It is hardly necessary to recall that, according to the Church's teaching "it is not forbidden to prefer governments tempered by popular rule ..." (*ibid.*).

Citizens and the Expanded Role of the State

The free expression of citizens, and their participation in promotion of the common good, are justified by a new line of reasoning: the contemporary State tends to pursue more and more initiatives and claim increasing sacrifices from its citizens.

With respect to the extent and nature of the sacrifices expected of all citizens in our times, when the activity of the State is so wide-ranging and decisive, many people see the democratic form of government as a natural postulate demanded by reason itself. So when "more democracy and a better democracy" is demanded, this can mean only that the citizen is to be set in an ever better position to hold his own opinion, express it and make its weight felt in a way in conformity with the common good (*ibid.*).

People and Masses

Likewise, a healthy democracy cannot succumb to exploitation of the masses. In luminous pages, Pius XII distinguishes between people and mass. The latter is formed by the totality of the population; it is a variegated whole which is easily swayed by leaders or media. Here Pius XII is perhaps taking account of the analyses of the masses by writers such as Ortega y Gasset or Heidegger (the anonymous "one") and later by von Wiese and Gurvitch. He sees the masses as "the main enemy of democracy" and considers that "the people lives with the fulness of the life of the men of

which it is composed" (*ibid.*). So here Pius XII is foreseeing the dangers—already described by Tocqueville—to which democracy is exposed, and is warning against possible manipulation of the masses.

People and amorphous multitude—or, as it is usually called, the mass—are two different concepts. The people lives and moves with a life that is its own. The mass is in itself inert and can be moved only from outside ... The mass ... waits for an external impulse and is simply an easy plaything in the hands of anyone who exploits its instincts or sensations (*ibid.*).

Democracy and Human Rights

Pius XII then continues:

Another conclusion clearly follows from this: the mass, as we have just defined it, is the chief enemy of true democracy and its ideal of liberty and equality.

In a people worthy of this name, the citizen feels in himself the awareness of his personality, rights, duties and personal freedom, together with respect for the freedom and dignity of others. In a people worthy of this name, the inequalities that arise not arbitrarily but from the very nature of things ... are no obstacle to the existence and prevalence of an authentic spirit of community and fraternity.

As against this picture of the democratic ideal of liberty and equality in a people governed by honest and farsighted hands, what a spectacle we see with a democratic State abandoned to the arbitrariness of the mass! (*ibid.*).

This passage from *Benignitas* is particularly important because—for the first time to our knowledge—a papal text clearly states the direct link between democracy and respect for human rights.

In *Benignitas* (1944), Pius XII refers to the equal dignity of each person, and his right to freedom—an elliptical reference to the great declaration on human rights as the basis of a peaceful society which he pronounced in his radio message *Con sempre* in 1942. This pioneering but too little-known declaration holds the seeds of the teaching that he would devote to democracy two years later.

V. JOHN XXIII

The opening announced by Pius XII is confirmed with John XXIII (1881-1958-1963). Encouraged by increased participation in business and economic life, the Good Pope stated in 1961:

Thus is created a humane environment that encourages the working classes to assume greater responsibility also within the enterprises, while at the same time political communities become ever more aware that all the citizens feel responsible for bringing about the common good in spheres of life (*Mater et magistra* [1961], 96).

John XXIII expands on some of his predecessors' stances. Firstly, there is the question of the origin of the power of authority:

It must not be concluded, however, because authority comes from God, that therefore men have no right to choose those who are to rule the state, to decide the form of government, and to determine both the way in which authority is to be exercised and its limits. It is thus clear that the doctrine which we have set forth is fully consonant with any truly democratic regime (*Pacem in terris* [1963], 52).

Then comes the question of the protection of human rights, which are also the object of a concise statement (*ibid.*, 11), and which the pope relates to the common good:

It is agreed that in our time the common good is chiefly guaranteed when personal rights and duties are maintained. The chief concern of civil authorities must therefore be to ensure that these rights are acknowledged, respected, coordinated with other rights, defended and promoted, so that in this way each one may more easily carry out his duties (*ibid.*, 60).

John XXIII also refers to the fact that authorized representatives are constituted, powers separated, and the State must be governed according to the rule of law.

In modern times, where there is question of organizing Communities juridically, there is observable first of all the tendency to write ... a charter of fundamental human rights, which is, as often as not, inserted in the State Constitutions ...

Secondly, there is also an inclination to determine, by the compilation of a document called the *Constitution*, the procedures through which the governing powers are to be created, along with their mutual relations, the spheres of their competence, the forms and systems they are obliged to follow in the performance of their office.

The relations between the government and the governed are then set forth in terms of rights and duties; and it is clearly laid down that the paramount task assigned to government officials is that of recognizing, respecting, reconciling, protecting and promoting the rights and duties of citizens (*ibid.*, 75-77).

In these two great social encyclicals, John XXIII, unlike Pius XII, does not in fact develop any systematic teaching on democracy. However, he does reiterate and confirm Pius XII's position on the origin of authority, and on the power of the people to elect their governors, limit the authority of the latter and regulate their use of it. Although this emphatic stand on the part of the two popes in no way disputes the principle of moral neutrality, the perspective has now shifted considerably. The principle that was often invoked to dispense the magisterium from criticizing the divine right of absolute monarchy or some oligarchical government (always so long as it

respected the common good, human rights, etc.), is used here to support the Church's statement that people are free to choose the third, democratic, type of government, which has tended to be ignored for so long. In the name of the same principle of neutrality, from now on the Church will show a prudent preference for democratic governments, which, in spite of their inherent risks, do offer better guarantees that human rights will be respected, as well as responding best to the just aspiration of all people for greater participation.

VI. VATICAN COUNCIL II

The word "democracy" was very little used in papal documents before 1965, and does not appear in any of the conciliar documents! This obviously does not mean that Vatican II represents some kind of regression. The themes already mentioned are reaffirmed exclusively in *Gaudium et spes* (1965): rejection of despotic, totalitarian, dictatorial governments (nos. 74ff), freedom to choose type of government and leaders (no. 74), a brief reminder of human rights (no. 26), a reference to the equal dignity of all people (no. 29), an appeal for the participation of all (nos. 31, 75). Human nature itself calls for such participation, with the right to elect entailing a corresponding duty:

It is fully consonant with human nature that there should be politico-judicial structures providing all citizens without any distinction with ever improving and effective opportunities to play an active part in the establishment of the juridical foundations of the political community, in the administration of public affairs ... Every citizen ought to be mindful of his right and his duty to promote the common good by using his vote (*ibid.*, 75).

Participation requires the rule of law and the separation of powers:

If the citizens' cooperation and their sense of responsibility are to produce favourable results ... a system of positive law is required providing for a suitable division of the functions and organs of public authority and an effective and independent protection of citizens' rights (*ibid.*).

We would again emphasize the broadening of the definition of common good to a worldwide scale. This new definition expands the universality of human rights, which was usually affirmed in the context of a particular community (for instance, a nation) but is here proclaimed for the benefit of all people:

... the common good, which is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily. The whole human race is consequently involved with regard to the rights and obligations which result (*ibid.*, 26).

The famous pastoral constitution also clarifies and expands on previous documents. It presents "basic" culture as the prerequisite for the contribution of all to the common good (no. 60); it insists on the right to information (no. 59); and, lastly, it envisages some exceptional situations, adding that even if such exceptions are necessary for the common good, they may not be prolonged:

... if restrictions are imposed temporarily for the common good on the exercise of human rights, these restrictions are to be lifted as soon as possible after the situation has changed. In any case it is inhuman for public authority to fall back on totalitarian methods or dictatorship which violate the rights of persons or social groups (*ibid.*, 75).

VII. PAUL VI

We owe Paul VI (1897-1963-1978) the apostolic exhortation *Octogesima adveniens* (1981) which declares "a radical limitation to economics" (no. 46). This text breaks new ground in its pressing call for Christian involvement in politics and its fuller appreciation of political activity. "Each man feels that in the social and economic field, both national and international, the ultimate decision rests with political power" (no. 46). The role and limits of political power are then specified:

It always intervenes with care for justice and with devotion to the common good, for which it holds final responsibility. It does not, for all that, deprive individuals and intermediary bodies of the field of activity and responsibility which are proper to them and which lead them to collaborate in the attainment of this common good (*ibid.*).

Here we see a reference to the principle of subsidiarity, which is then spelled out:

The passing to the political dimension ... expresses a demand made by the man of today: a greater sharing in responsibility and in decision-making. This legitimate aspiration becomes more evident as the cultural level arises, as the sense of freedom develops and as man becomes more aware of how, in a world facing an uncertain future, the choices of today already condition the life of tomorrow (*ibid.*, 47).

The most striking feature of *Octogesima adveniens* is the open stand in support of democracy. Dangers no longer come only from various kinds of despotism, but also from technocracy:

In order to counterbalance increasing technocracy, modern forms of democracy must be devised, not only making it possible for each man to become informed and to express himself, but also by involving him in a shared responsibility.

Thus human groups will gradually begin to share and to live as communities. Thus freedom ... will develop in its deepest human reality: to involve itself and to spend itself in building up active and lived solidarity (*ibid.*).

VIII. JOHN PAUL II

Coming at the end of the above overview, the teaching of John Paul II (1920-1978-) seems truly liberating.⁵ No more archaic typologies, repressed nostalgia for patronage or the divine right of monarchs, and timid approval of democracy. The whiff of sulphur has vanished in both word and fact. The connections are obviously clear, for continuity requires this, but the emphasis is already new:

The Church has always taught the duty to act for the common good ... Furthermore, she has always taught that the fundamental duty of power is solicitude for the common good of society; this is what gives power its fundamental rights. Precisely in the name of these premises of the objective ethical order, the rights of power can only be understood on the basis of respect for the objective and inviolable rights of man. The common good that authority in the State serves is brought to full realization only when all the citizens are sure of their rights. The lack of this leads to the dissolution of society, opposition by citizens to authority, or a situation of oppression, intimidation, violence, and terrorism, of which many examples have been provided by the totalitarianisms of this century. Thus the principle of human rights is of profound concern to the area of social justice and is the measure by which it can be tested in the life of political bodies (*Redemptor hominis* [1979], 17).

This marks the end of a hypothetical-deductive way of thinking *which attributed only secondary importance to the quality of institutional mediations*. In minimizing this essential problem, it was easy for such a line of thought to conclude—with the support of St Paul—that since “there is no authority except from God” (Rom 13:1), citizens had to obey it without questioning the legitimacy of power. *Lèse-majesté* was as much a religious sin as a political failing.

Our brief survey shows that it became increasingly hard to sustain this totally outdated view of power, which was, moreover, an obstacle to reflection on democracy. It was becoming blindingly clear that the Roman

⁵ See Daniel DUSTIN and Charles PIRE, *La politique selon Jean-Paul II* (Paris: Éd. Universitaires, 1993), particularly Chapter 3, “Pour la démocratie”, pp. 29-40.

magisterium, still only recently agitated by the loss of the Papal States, could no longer proclaim a doctrine in which some people detected a masked theocracy.

Fully aware of what a theocracy can be, whether secularized or not, knowing what a totalitarian regime is, and observing the limitations of western democracies, John Paul II dismisses the outmoded elements of the issue of power. While freeing the Church of these, he also collects all the elements of traditional teaching that can be used in support of democracy.

The alternative to corrupt government is not just any undefined type of government, but democracy. The principle of moral neutrality is no longer invoked. After considering the situation of various countries, John Paul II says:

Other nations need to reform certain unjust structures, and in particular their *political institutions*, in order to replace corrupt, dictatorial and authoritarian forms of government by *democratic* and *participatory* ones. This is a process which we hope will spread and grow stronger. For the "health" of a political community—as expressed in the free and responsible participation of all citizens in public affairs, in the rule of law and in respect for and promotion of human rights—is the *necessary condition and sure guarantee* of the development of "the whole individual and of all people" (*Sollicitudo rei socialis* [1987], 44).

The participation recommended here is interdependence and solidarity:

When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a "virtue", is *solidarity*. This ... is a *firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible for *all* (*ibid.*, 38).

The regard for democracy is again clearly stated in 1988:

Democracies have the honour of seeking an organization of society in which the person is not only respected in all that he or she is but also participates in the common task by exercising his or her free will (*Address to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*, Strasbourg, 8 October 1988).

However, we find the most explicit declaration in favour of democracy in *Centesimus annus* (1991):

The Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility of both electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate (*Centesimus annus*, 46).

John Paul II then outlines the conditions to be met by democracy if it is to be authentic:

Authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person. It requires that the necessary conditions be present for the advancement both of the individual through education and formation in true ideals, and of the "subjectivity" of society through the creation of structures of participation and shared responsibility (*ibid.*).

The pope also applies to democracy the teaching that he would shortly develop in the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* (1993): it is not for the majority to define the truth; democracy cannot be built on agnosticism and sceptical relativism.

Nowadays there is a tendency to claim that agnosticism and sceptical relativism are the philosophy and basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life. Those who are convinced that they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are considered unreliable from a democratic point of view, since they do not accept that truth is determined by the majority, or that it is subject to variation according to different political trends. It must be observed in this regard that if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism (*ibid.*).

The search for these values, which are expressed in human rights, is an essential feature of democracy.

Following the collapse of Communist totalitarianism and of many other totalitarian and "national security" regimes, today we are witnessing a predominance, not without signs of opposition, of the democratic ideal, together with lively attention to and concern for human rights. But for this very reason it is necessary for peoples in the process of reforming their systems to give democracy an authentic and solid foundation through the explicit recognition of those rights (*ibid.*, 47).

John Paul II then spells out the main human rights, as his predecessors had regularly done. It should be noted that John Paul II states that the right to life, belittled by the "scandal of abortion", mortgages the democratic character of governments that authorize this practice:

Among the most important of these [human] rights, mention must be made of the right to life, an integral part of which is the right of the child to develop in the mother's womb from the moment of conception; the right to live in a united family ...; the right to develop one's intelligence and freedom in seeking and knowing the truth; the right to share in work ...; and the right freely to establish a family ...

Even in countries with democratic forms of government, these rights are not

always fully respected. Here we are referring not only to the scandal of abortion, but also to different aspects of a crisis within democracies themselves, which seem at times to have lost the ability to make decisions aimed at the common good (*ibid.*).

He concludes:

... the synthesis of these rights is religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in conformity with one's transcendent dignity as a person (*ibid.*).

For John Paul II this right to religious freedom is the touchstone of authentic democracy—a fact he confirmed near the start of his papacy:

The Church has defined an overall position according to which religious freedom is simply one facet of the single prism of freedom, which is an essential constitutive element of an authentically modern and democratic society. This means that ... a State cannot claim to be "democratic" if it opposes religious freedom in any way whatsoever, with respect not only to the exercise and practice of worship, but also to participation on an equal footing in scholastic and educational activities, as well as social initiatives, in which the lives of contemporary men and women are increasingly involved (*Address to the 69th Conference of the Interparliamentary Union*, 18 September 1982).

CONCLUSION

1. When we try to study democracy in the teaching of the Church, we are most struck by the rarity of systematic statements—a rarity in contrast with the large amount of scattered but relatively uncoordinated material on the subject. We have already noted that the word is not found in the documents of Vatican II. It does not appear in the index of the first edition of *Discours social de l'Église catholique*. Marmy's collection, which covers nearly 150 years, finds it once in Leo XIII, and more often in Pius XII. In Father Utz's monumental collection devoted to Pius XII, references are somewhat more frequent and would repay systematic examination. However, it is with John Paul II that the topic starts to appear fairly regularly—and more particularly that the spotlight is really focused on it.

2. Democracy as a subject can be split into a number of other topics; the main ones were mentioned in the first part of this Preparatory Report. Magisterial declarations on democracy certainly do not cover all these topics or explore their interrelations. The themes that do appear in papal documents relating to democracy include in particular: human rights, the origin of power and authority, choice of governors, participation, religious freedom, the role of the State, subsidiarity. These are classical—and essential—

themes. However, it must be admitted that nowhere is there a detailed discussion of the problems raised by different conceptions and contemporary models of democracy. In the last analysis, teaching on this subject seems somewhat sketchy and in urgent need of development. This is all the more surprising given that most of the doctrinal bases are available.

3. The Church has doubtless been loath to pursue reflection on political democracy too far, afraid that the structure of the Church and the way authority is exercised within it would be thrown into question. And here we have a paradox: if the Church is not a democracy in the political sense of the term, it is nevertheless a society of equals, sons and daughters of the same Father. Although the Church is not a democracy in the political sense of the term, it is a community of persons of equal dignity, sons and daughters of the same Father; and although the Church has a hierarchical structure, it can be accepted that the people should participate in the choice of the person to be the repository of authority, and also provide input for his decisions.

Chapter III

SUGGESTIONS TO THE ACADEMY

I. POINTING THE WAY TO DEMOCRACY

At the start of the second chapter above, we noted the historical factors that, at least to some extent, explain the Church's delay in speaking out on democracy. We would recall that these date back to the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the excesses of socialism and liberalism.

Such historical explanations cannot be separated from doctrinal explanations,⁶ which must also be carefully described, not for any apologetic concern, but in order to indicate the orientations that Christian thought must take into account in its present-day reflection on democracy.

Christian reflection cannot accept the individualist anthropology generally underlying the liberal conception of democracy, but places heavy stress on the fact that man, as a social being, is a person open and receptive to others.

Nor can the Church accept Rousseau's conception of contract, the sovereignty of the people, the general will, the majority, the lay "sanctity" of laws, and civil religion.

⁶ Reference can be made to the *minidossier per l'animazione*, no. 23, supplement to *La Società* (Verona), year VI (1996), no. 3, entitled *La democrazia*.

It was and is also impossible for the Church to follow in the steps of Kant's metaphysical agnosticism, and accept a formally voluntarist basis for values. This is why it cannot accept that the law is a purely formal construction, and warns against a law that has its sole source in the will of the legislator. Precisely because of its anthropology, the Church considers that the law must be referred to a metajudicial order, in other words that the law cannot condone moral and metaphysical relativism.

Although the Second Vatican Council did not speak out on democracy, it did open the way to further study of this latter point. In its declarations on tolerance⁷ and religious freedom,⁸ it did of course confirm that the Church cannot approve rejection of objective values and points of reference; however, this teaching does allow the pluralism so typical of democracy to be viewed in another light than that of a resigned pragmatism.

The Church's attitude to democracy is not only dictated by doctrinal considerations but also reflects a solid political realism. The Church does not see democracy as being automatically capable of producing good effects—and observation of current events offers daily confirmation of this view. Democracy discredits itself through corruption, abuse of power, the frequent confusion of common good with personal good, partisan politics, and certain forms of censure or tyranny exercised by the media.

The Church thus follows a tradition going back to Aristotle, recommending the moral virtues whose practice is a necessary condition—albeit only partial—for democracy: justice, a social sense, solidarity, prudence, fortitude, moderation, respect for others, etc.

II. TOWARD A FULLER DOCTRINAL UNDERSTANDING

It is a question of showing that *only an authentic democratic government can ensure that the demands of Christian social ethics are met*. We would point out that we have defended this thesis in *Démocratie et libération Chrétienne. Principes pour l'action politique* (Paris: Ed. Lethielleux, 1986)—a thesis that can be argued on the basis of the following points:

1. Society does not arise only from the natural dispositions of individuals, but is indispensable for their personal realization; it is *always already there*, as a natural reality. Man is a social being *because*, being finite, he is endowed with reason and free will. Each person is capable of

⁷ See *Gaudium et spes*, 28 and 73.

⁸ See *Dignitatis humanae*.

judgment and personal decision, and also, thanks to language, of discussion, debate and reflection. This is why—and not for purely utilitarian reasons—political power is a necessity and *has* to be exercised within a democratic structure. Authority must bring an existential *plus* to individuals, to persons—as is required by the principle of subsidiarity. It must give people the possibility of exercising their capacity to reason, discuss, reflect, plan, decide, act, implement and monitor *together*, by expanding it. Power has to coordinate the activities of all so that each person can be offered the best possible conditions for his or her personal fulfilment—which is what constitutes the *common good*.

2. Here we see the centrality of reference to God for the justification of power. This reference introduces a factor that *relativizes* and *moderates* power, and is sadly absent from *all* contemporary ideologies, even “democratic” ones. If, speaking biblically, in God’s plan “it is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18), and if, speaking philosophically, God has endowed man, as a rational and free being, with a social constitution, it is part of God’s plan that people be provided with power structures in order to organize their life together. This is not simply a right, but a duty. Finally, power is *relativized* and *moderated*: in specifically political terms, power *puts men*—who have *all* received the same social constitution from the same God—*into relation*.

3. This has two immediate results:

(a) that no person is entitled to exercise an authority over another that is not reasonable, freely consented to, justified, and in a word legitimate;

(b) that, under pain of alienation, i.e. of entering into voluntary servitude (cf. Boethius), no person has reason to obey except through enlightened and free consent to the one who commands.

Many modern and contemporary theoreticians of power have not recognized that their very finitude means that neither prince nor people is entitled to claim to be the ultimate holder of power. In this sense, the absolutism of the prince finds its exact counterpart in the revolutionary anarchy of the people.

4. Reference to God shows that in the final analysis all human power is *delegated*. Here we find a viable meaning for St Paul’s phrase, “there is no authority except from God”. God *delegates* to people responsibility for *governing themselves*, as he delegates responsibility for *procreation*. God gives people his *proxy*, bestowing on them everything needed for them to take charge of their existence because, thanks to their reason, people can know their origins and destiny, as well as the laws governing their existence.

In a way, as St Thomas basically says, "*Man is for himself his own providence*" (cf. for example SG, III, 113).

In management of society, as in management of the natural world, man thus enjoys an *autonomy* based on his existential relation to his Creator, and this, for the same reason, brings into play the inventiveness and responsibility of each finite being. His vocation as man is to *invent* his relations with the world and time, *and with others in society*. It follows that ways of choosing the prince are left to man's initiative, but also that no man is entitled to dispense himself—still less to be dispensed—from the political responsibilities falling to him because of his social nature. Although the ultimate source of power is God, this in no way cancels the legitimacy and even the need for human forms of mediation, and every person *has* to play a part in inventing these.

5. The theocracies mentioned above thus have limits, which must be defined. They of course affirm that power comes from God, and also introduce a certain element of moderation into the exercise of power. For example, Louis XIV exercised *absolute* power, which he claimed to hold directly from God. If the king so to speak totally overshadows the people, so be it, but he will have to render account to God. However, no more than anarchy, a similarly absolutist conception of power which does not admit the *need for just human mediations*. It is no exaggeration to hold that inasmuch as the *metaphysics of existential participation* exalts the equal dignity of all people, it justifies the active participation of *all* in political power and underlies the inalienable responsibility of *each person* toward the search for the common good.

These in our view are the safest anchor-holds of any authentic democracy, whose heart lies in the *principle of subsidiarity*.

6. Finally, from the perspective of the new evangelization, we have to announce to the world that fraternity is not possible without the Father. No democracy is possible if the dignity of *all* people is not recognized from the outset. Entrance into democracy is *first of all a moral event* which involves and engages us all and entails primordial recognition of the equal dignity of all men—the fact that we, he and I, both derive our dignity from the same God who created us, keeps us in existence, and sustains us in his love.

III. FACING THE DIFFICULTIES

We shall have to face the difficulties that today arise with respect to democracy. Let us mention some of these:

1. The connection and integration of social and economic democracy (cf. trade unionism, co-management, etc.) and political democracy.
2. We have to establish an interface between our work on *unemployment* and our work on democracy.
3. The ideal of *equality*, which is central to Christian tradition and to the political and juridical tradition of the West, is under strong attack. However, it is essential to classic models of democracy. The question of equality is so important that it would be a good idea for our Academy to initiate a dialogue on this question with Moslems and the major religions of the East.
4. The various kinds of doubt being cast on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) raise a question; could there be new and pressing reasons today for rejecting the "unwritten laws" binding on all, governed and governors?
5. Debates on conflicts of values, seen as inevitable and insoluble, and the resulting rejection of any transcendent principle, raise the question: in such circumstances, how are we to establish and ensure the progress of a democratic society?
6. Can human rights, and hence democracy, be altered depending on culture? Should we initiate dialogue on this question with Moslems? Is democracy not the privilege of an elite?
7. Personally we believe that the legalization of abortion in certain countries raises basic questions concerning democracy. When a democratic country legalizes abortion, by this very act it restricts the all-embracing nature of the right of every human being to life.
8. The strong revival of segregationist and discriminatory views—based, for example, on psychological, genetic or socio-biological considerations—views that some want to turn into laws, runs counter to the democratic dynamic.
9. What benefit can the Church derive *for itself* from the experience of democracy? For example, in the 13th century the new religious orders drew important lessons from the rise of communes, and thereby benefited the Church.
10. Can a democracy be based on purely "positive"—voluntarist, contractual, consensual, utilitarian, etc.—bases? Are there any empirical democratic models founded on these bases?
11. What does reference to God contribute to the proclamation, protection and promotion of human rights? The American Declaration of Independence (1776) holds it as self-evident that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights". When the 1789 Declaration of Human and Citizens' Rights refers to a

supreme Being, it gives a lay interpretation of these rights. Does universality gain thereby? Does experience show that political agnosticism or atheism are better able to guarantee democracy than reference to the Creator as bestowing inalienable rights?

IV. NEW HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

Any discussion of the Church and democracy entails the inherent danger of embarking on a debate that has already lost much contemporary relevance. History is what it is, with its shadows and lights, and although evaluations are of course necessary, the main point is to anticipate new problems so as to be prepared for them when they arise. Despite the Second Vatican Council's call for attention to the signs of the times, this forward-looking effort is often lacking in Catholic circles. For example, it is not enough for moral experts to react after the event in the face of a given situation, simply offering a moral judgement. A social and political morality must also be a morality of the future, of action, and such a morality requires an ongoing task of discernment and looking to the future.

As soon as the Church opens up to social and political democracy—and the 20th century offers a good many examples—it runs the risk of being one war behind if it does not take the measure of current debates and realize what is at stake. I think that our Academy has a special role to play here: that of being a watchman, and of barking if need be (cf. Is 56:10).

Inasmuch as the quality of democracy is closely bound up with the specific conception of human rights, there are reasons for serious concern at present. Various UN agencies are using numerous publications and international meetings in a concerted attempt to establish a new conception of human rights, which could lead to a universal charter overriding the 1948 Universal Declaration. It is not simply a question of rephrasing the declaration on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, but of drawing up and implementing a globalistic or "holistic" (to use New Age terminology) project.⁹ This project would entail rejection of the Judaeo-Christian monotheistic tradition and its connected concept of equality, and would accept new forms of discrimination and/or segregation based on genetic and/or financial criteria. Health itself would be subordinated to market imperatives, and new rights, such as that to "reproductive health", would be proclaimed by "consensus" and incorporated into national bodies of legislation.

⁹ We analyze this project in detail in *L'Evangile face au Nouveau Désordre mondial* (Paris: Fayard, 1997).

When we realize that the expression "reproductive health" is used to cover a wide variety of models of family, homosexuality, and the "right" to abortion and euthanasia, there are very real grounds for concern. Similarly, a certain neo-pagan exaltation of the Earth as Mother tends to reduce the individual to a passing moment in the cosmos, to whose laws he must submit.

There are also major grounds for concern with regard to institutions, when we see, for example, that the UN or the European Union are behaving increasingly as supranational governmental bodies, which pay little heed to individual national features, intermediary bodies, and subsidiarity. Is it not worrying to see how the UN uses certain NGOs to subvert the authority of legitimate national governments? Similarly, can we look on while "satisfied" societies (to use the expression coined by J.K. Galbraith) manipulate foreign aid to keep control over poor countries, while the majority of the latter still have no idea of what exactly a *social* democracy really is.

This gives rise to the question of what has happened to representation today, and the right of the nations and citizens of the whole world to exercise supervision over these new international institutions.

Present changes, which we simply mention here, justify fears that are all the greater inasmuch as they arise at a time when the economy is becoming globalized and when the sciences of life are making huge steps forward. Never have leaders with few scruples had the means of such a fearsome power within their reach.

As our colleague Mary Ann Glendon has observed, certain essential features of democracy are gradually vanishing. A rising new international oligarchy is causing grave concern over the "technocratic tyranny" that it seeks to establish. We must take account of this observation, for any change in the conception of human rights is bound to have a direct and lasting effect on future conceptions of democracy—for better or worse.

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