

University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

UST Research Online

Catholic Studies Faculty Publications

Catholic Studies

2020

The Methodological Impact of Fides et Ratio on Catholic Social Teaching

Martin Schlag

University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.stthomas.edu/cas_cath_pub

Recommended Citation

Schlag, Martin, "The Methodological Impact of Fides et Ratio on Catholic Social Teaching" (2020).

Catholic Studies Faculty Publications. 9.

https://ir.stthomas.edu/cas_cath_pub/9

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Catholic Studies at UST Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in Catholic Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UST Research Online. For more information, please contact asle4660@stthomas.edu.

THE METHODOLOGICAL IMPACT OF *FIDES ET RATIO* ON CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

MARTIN SCHLAG 

Abstract

John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio* is of astonishing importance for the methodology of Catholic social teaching. This article highlights three points that emerged as contributions of *Fides et Ratio* to the epistemology and methodology of the social magisterium. According to *Gaudium et Spes*, Catholic social teaching is essentially a service of the Church that affects social life indirectly by making a free offer of sense and faith. *Fides et Ratio* reinforces this paradigm shift by rejecting fideism also in matters of social morality. In this, it goes beyond Vatican I, *Dei Filius*. The encyclical further clarifies that the method of Catholic social teaching is tripartite and requires the cooperation of at least three disciplines: theology, philosophy, and social sciences. Because of the shifting character of history, Catholic social teaching too fluctuates. It is sensitive to time and place, to history and culture.

1. Introduction

The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (FR)¹ does not explicitly mention the concept “Social Teaching of the Church,” nor are social, political and economic issues prominent on its pages. This is not surprising because Pope John Paul II did not have the social teaching of the Church in the forefront of his mind when writing this encyclical, but rather philosophy in general, and its relationship with theology. It is therefore all the more surprising how important *Fides et Ratio* is for the methodology of the social teaching of the Church. This not only because of the Pope's consideration that the acquisition of truth through faith is anthropologically richer than mere evidence. Belief, in fact,

involves an interpersonal relationship and brings into play not only a person's capacity to know but also the deeper capacity to entrust oneself to others, to enter into a relationship with them which is intimate and enduring.²

Martin Schlag
Catholic Studies, University of St. Thomas, 2115 Summit Avenue, 55S, St. Paul, MN 55105, USA
Email: schl2455@stthomas.edu

¹ In the footnotes I use the abbreviation FR. For the text of the encyclical see: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html.

² FR, n. 32.

Faith, be it human or religious, includes relationship and trust. Many of our convictions about history, the world, society, other people, etc. are not the results of our immediate personal experience or perception, but the belief in something that others have told us, others whom we believe because they seem trustworthy to us. Much of our “knowing” is “faith” or “belief.” Without faith it would be impossible to learn anything from someone else; we would not share a common culture or a national identity. We could only be loners outside of society. Obviously, exact science is a way to the truth, but the diffusion of its discoveries presupposes the faith of the many, who are not able to understand the details of the research, that the scientists’ discoveries are credible. If that faith is based on justified elements of credibility, the probability is high that it will lead us to the truth that creates communion, culture and therefore society. This characteristic of human gnoseology alone could suffice to open the doors of society to the social teaching of the Church: social morality seeks the principles of justice that shape society and order it toward the common good. For this reason, the Church’s social teaching reflects mainly on good human relations, based on truth and freedom, justice and charity. A society that structures itself according to such high humanistic principles constitutes an ideal climate to reach the truth, because it rejects falsehood and deception, violence and resentments that distract from the peaceful acquisition of truth. The openness to faith as an anthropological phenomenon opens the way to Christian revelation and therefore also to the social teaching of the Church. If human faith, that is, faith as trust, is a way to the truth, why exclude *a priori* the possibility of supernatural faith? Would that not be “secularist dogmatism,” as pernicious as religious dogmatism?

In addition to having pointed out the relational dimension of belief, there are other, theological reasons for the importance of *Fides et Ratio* for the methodology of the social teaching of the Church, reasons whose significance we come to realize against the backdrop of the historical development of the social teachings of the popes. In the historical perspective, we perceive the special *meaning* of *Fides et Ratio* in its own time, and also its particular *relevance* today. Following the insights of hermeneutic philosophy, I strive to integrate *Fides et Ratio* as text into a tradition of thought that emerges as a meaningful whole. “Meaning,” as I use it here, refers to the novelty of a text in the historical moment, in which it saw the light of day; “relevance” to changes in the context that affect the text and its contemporary understanding.³ My students, for example, when they read the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* can no longer perceive its innovative character: everything seems normal and obvious to them. Only a historical study of the magisterium reveals the profound innovation that the text signaled at the time. As Alexis de Tocqueville already noted, “great revolutions which succeed make the causes which produced them disappear, and thus become incomprehensible because of their own success.”⁴

On the following pages I will describe three elements of the meaning of *Fides et Ratio* in the context of 1998, and its corresponding relevance today.

2. The Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* Overcomes “Social Fideism”

In the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II repeatedly rejected fideism⁵ as well as rationalism.⁶ Here, I concentrate on fideism and will briefly mention rationalism in one of the next

³ For a very useful overview see Jens Zimmermann, *Hermeneutics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-18.

⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, vol. 1, edited by François Furet and Françoise Mélonio, trans. Alan S. Kahan (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), Book 1, chapter 1, 95.

⁵ See FR, 52, 53, 55.

⁶ See FR, 45, 52-55, 91.

sections. Fideism is a relatively recent concept, and in the Catholic tradition has assumed a mainly pejorative meaning.⁷ The word “fideism” seems to have been used for the first time by Pius X in his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* in 1907. He used the concept to reject the idea of faith as an irrational sentiment for the unknown that wells up in persons who are thus inclined when they hit the limits of science and knowledge.⁸

In general, fideism is an attitude of distrust of reason in relation to the truth claims of Christian revelation that can lead either to the rejection of faith altogether or to a wrong form of understanding of faith as merely subjective sentiment. This alarmed the Church hierarchy, especially after the upheaval of the French Revolution. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century was therefore engaged in a struggle on two fronts that had a common root in the opposition of faith and reason (in its positivistic form): rationalism and fideism. These were some of the main concerns of the First Vatican Council. Without using the word “fideism,” however, the Magisterium had defended the capacity of human reason to prove the existence of God, the immortality of the human soul, principles of metaphysics and other grounds of credibility already before the First Vatican Council.⁹ This Council is an important point of reference for the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* because it deals with the relationship between faith and reason in its dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius*.¹⁰ In the style of the nineteenth century, the Council condemned the doctrine that divine revelation cannot be made credible by outward signs and that we can be moved to faith solely by our inner experience or personal inspiration.¹¹ In this, the First Vatican Council had the defense of faith against the criticism of rationalism as its main objective. Furthermore, its focus was on natural science or cosmology, not the social sciences that barely existed in 1870. In the nineteenth century, due to their vertiginous rise, the natural sciences were the Magisterium’s main concern. Their discoveries and results (evolution, astrology, seemingly unlimited technical progress, medicine, etc.) questioned and confounded many of the traditional convictions of the Christian religious worldview. At the time, culturally speaking, there was great optimism regarding man’s capacity to solve the challenges of life with mere human reason. Nevertheless, the First Vatican Council in *Dei Filius* also defended human reason as *ordo cognitionis* (a source of truth in its own right), not only faith.¹² The bishops at the Council were at pains to maintain a balance between faith and reason. In condemning fideism, the fathers of the First Vatican Council wished to uphold the “perpetual common belief of the Catholic Church” that “there is a twofold order of knowledge, distinct not only in its principle but also in its object.” Natural reason can attain the knowledge of some truths about God but others need to be revealed to us in order to be known.¹³

What the fathers of the First Vatican Council were blind to was an attitude we could call “social fideism,” that is the negation or belittlement of the role of reason and of the social sciences in the topics dealt with by the social teaching of the Church, or of the practical truth

⁷ See Richard Amesbury, “Fideism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/fideism/>>.

⁸ See its n. 7; http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html.

⁹ See the condemnation of the errors of Louis-Eugène Bautain in *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum/Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, edited by Heinrich Denzinger, Peter Hünermann, Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2012) [henceforth DH], 2751-2756; 2765-2769; and of Augustin Bonnetty, DH 2811-2814.

¹⁰ See DH, 3000-3045.

¹¹ See DH, 3033.

¹² See DH, 3015

¹³ DH, 3015.

of social behavior. Whereas fideism, generally speaking, refers to theoretical knowledge (speculative reason concerning God), social fideism refers to practical truth or moral norms of Christian behavior in society. In this context, Judith A. Merkle has pointed to the connection between the prevalent ecclesiology of the time and the social teaching of the Church. From Pius IX into the early twentieth century, the Church's social teaching was influenced by ultramontanism, which aimed at "establishing a systematic set of authoritative instructions binding for all the faithful as a Catholic response to social problems."¹⁴ The underlying assumption of this attitude was that the Church alone, understood as the hierarchical Magisterium, could perform the moral task of social reform. The consequence was that the complexities of social, political, and economic life in some instances were not sufficiently grasped by confessors and spiritual directors. For instance, when Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* required employers to pay their workers a living wage, some confessors interpreted this literally as due in strict justice. This, however, could and did put undue strain on employers when the complexities of the market economy were not taken into consideration. "An accurate understanding of the teaching regarding a just wage required a grasp of the 'sciences' of wage creation."¹⁵ Such an attitude in Catholic social teaching that I have called "social fideism" was precisely one of the main reasons for the criticism by Joseph Ratzinger in 1964.¹⁶ His argument at the time was that the social teaching of the Church before the Second Vatican Council contained ideological elements, i.e. propositions that were thinly clad as natural law or theology but in reality declared contingent historical structures of society as normative. This had been an attempt to somehow regain the Church's lost political and social relevance in modern pluralist social settings. Catholic social teaching consisted in deducing norms for society from principles of natural law, which resulted in a kind of moral "positivism." This method was changed by the Second Vatican Council in its Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. Although the Council maintained the principle that the Magisterium of the Church can declare as immoral also particular acts in the socio-political sphere, these interventions are limited to the salvation of souls and the rights of the human person, that is, to very serious occasions.¹⁷ For the other cases (the vast majority), *Gaudium et Spes* proposes not induction, as the method diametrically contrary to deduction, but a method that has been called "abduction." In this method, one starts from accepted principles that are then modified by new insights. An example would be the astronomic theories of Kepler, who improved the basic insight of Copernicus thanks to the observations of Brahe.¹⁸ Abduction is form of non-deductive inference, based on prior knowledge, different from induction.¹⁹ Applying it to the social teaching of the Church means in practice that faith and the world mutually learn from each other. The Church teaches the world the word of the Lord, but she also learns from the world. Obviously, from a perspective of faith, the last

¹⁴ Judith A. Merkle, "From Catholic Social Teaching to Catholic Social Tradition," in *Theology and Social Sciences*, edited by Michael Horace Barnes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 241-58, 250.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, "Naturrecht, Evangelium und Ideologie in der katholischen Soziallehre. Katholische Erwägungen zum Thema," in *Gesammelte Schriften Band 4, Einführung in das Christentum. Bekenntnis – Taufe – Nachfolge* (Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2014), 769–76 (originally published in 1964).

¹⁷ See *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76.

¹⁸ See Hans-Jörg Sander, "Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute *Gaudium et spes*," in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil, vol 4*, edited by Peter Hünemann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath (Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2009), 581–916, 698-99.

¹⁹ See Igor Douven, "Abduction," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/abduction/>>.

word in such a dialogue is Christ, the living Word that reveals man to man. Consequently, the mission of the social teaching of the Church is above all a service of Faith: the offering of meaning, the proposal (not the imposition) of a supernatural horizon in which and only in which human reality discovers itself as what it really is: a creature who without the Creator becomes incomprehensible.²⁰ The service of the social teaching of the Church is thus hermeneutical. As the word says, it helps interpret and understand human conduct in society. Behavior that seems irrelevant acquires new importance in the light of the love of Jesus Christ.

The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* presupposes the methodological changes in Catholic social teaching brought about by the Second Vatican Council, and repeatedly emphasizes that reason is capable of reaching the truth also in its practical dimension, and that therefore the considerations in the encyclical apply also to moral theology:

It is no less urgent that philosophy be recovered at the point where the understanding of faith is linked to the moral life of believers. Faced with contemporary challenges in the social, economic, political and scientific fields, the ethical conscience of people is disoriented. In the Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, I wrote that many of the problems of the contemporary world stem from a crisis of truth.²¹

This is important for the issue of social fideism that refers to practical truth or morality. *Fides et Ratio* applies its teachings explicitly to moral theology and, in its context, to the current challenges in the social, economic, political and scientific fields. In other words, *Fides et Ratio* completes or is complementary to the First Vatican Council: following the methodological changes of the Second Vatican Council, it adds the magisterial rejection of social fideism to the previous condemnation of fideism in general by the First Vatican Council. Benedict XVI applied the expression fideism in the context of the social teaching of the Church: “Truth frees charity from the constraints of an emotionalism that deprives it of relational and social content, and of a fideism that deprives it of human and universal breathing-space.”²² At least on the level of official papal teaching, this last quotation confirms the interpretation of *Fides et Ratio* that I have just presented.

Once it has been established that the renewed methodology of Catholic social thought requires both faith *and* reason, the question of their relationship arises with force. Here the teaching of Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* becomes relevant. In this document, Paul VI wrote that it was not the mission of the Magisterium to propose a universal solution for the widely varying situations in the world, but that it was rather

up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel’s unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms [criteria]²³ of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church.²⁴

²⁰ See *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 36.

²¹ FR, 98.

²² Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 3.

²³ The official Latin version uses the noun “norma[s],” whereas the Italian version uses the word “criteri.” I have not been able to establish whether Paul VI wrote in Latin or in Italian. I assume, however, that Italian was the first and original language in which he (or his ghost writers) wrote. I prefer the concept of “criteria” because it avoids a legalistic misconception, and therefore in the following text I always use the word “criteria.”

²⁴ Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, n. 4; http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html.

The way this sentence is formulated does not make clear whether the “principles, the criteria, and the directives” are on the same epistemological level, that is to say whether they are all merely diverse expressions of Catholic social teaching, all emanating from the same source and all of equal character and validity. In other words, the question is whether it is the social teaching of the Church that produces principles, criteria, and directives, or whether, in contrast, the principles correspond to the highest and most abstract level, the criteria to a more concrete level, and the directives to the most immediate level of specific action in particular circumstances. In other words, do the three concepts belong to the same discipline (the social teaching of the Church), or are they fruits of three disciplines with different methodologies and different scopes?

Again *Fides et Ratio* sheds light on our question. John Paul II distinguished three levels of knowledge or “modes of truth.” The first level corresponds to that of immediate evidence and experimentation (science); the second to that of philosophy; and the third, to “religious truths which are to some degree grounded in philosophy, and which we find in the answers which the different religious traditions offer to the ultimate questions.”²⁵ In the Catholic tradition, this level corresponds to theology.

Later in the encyclical, John Paul II repeats this threefold structure or approach, applying it specifically to questions of social morality:

Throughout the Encyclical I underscored clearly the fundamental role of truth in the moral field. In the case of the more pressing ethical problems, this truth demands of moral theology a careful enquiry rooted unambiguously in the word of God.²⁶

The Pope assigns to theology the reflection on the word of God, that is, the highest and most abstract level. It is the level of the principles of wisdom that Sacred Scripture contains. However, alone theology is not able to solve the concrete challenges to the Church’s social teaching. John Paul II continues:

In order to fulfill its mission, moral theology must turn to a philosophical ethics which looks to the truth of the good, . . .²⁷

This is the second level, that of philosophy, that develops ethical criteria for political and social praxis. Of special importance in this field are the virtues of prudence, as *recta ratio agibilium*, and justice, as the first social principle. As is well known, St. Thomas distinguished several fields of prudence according to the specific field of human action. Among others, he referred to political, economic, and military prudence, thus stressing the essential need of an intermediary epistemological level.²⁸

However, philosophy is not enough either. In order to act in a way that respects the reality surrounding people’s lives, politicians — or, in general, persons in charge of a community — need to know the facts. In a complicated society like ours, the data is gathered by the social sciences. Pope John Paul II mentions them in several passages of the encyclical.²⁹ Only thanks to a unitary vision that combines the three levels can social moral theology and the social teaching of the Church give correct directives for action.

²⁵ FR, n. 30.

²⁶ FR, n. 98.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 50.

²⁹ See FR, n. 30, 61, 69.

Drawing on this organic vision, . . . moral theology will be able to tackle the various problems in its competence, such as peace, social justice, the family, the defense of life and the natural environment, in a more appropriate and effective way.³⁰

In this way, *Fides et Ratio* brings into focus the methodology of the social teaching of the Church that *Octogesima Adveniens* had only sketched. The three concepts used by Paul VI (principles, criteria, directives for action) correspond to three epistemological levels that reside in three disciplines: theology or the sapiential level delivers the principles; philosophy on the prudential-ethical level proposes criteria of reflection; and social sciences together with the techniques and skills (*ars* as *recta ratio factibilium*) direct our actions in the specific situation on the operational or technical level. In this article, I can only hint at the debate on the role and limits of the social sciences in Catholic social thought.³¹ As Christopher Dawson taught and exemplified in his own work, theology in general, and Catholic social thought as a part of moral theology in particular must integrate the findings of the social sciences, without surrendering their own identity or succumbing to the limits of social science as empirical science. Nevertheless, mutual respect and cooperation between theology and the social sciences benefit both sides. Helped by theology, the social sciences are able to address the religious phenomenon correctly, as it is understood and lived out by men and women who truly believe in the meta-empirical intervention of God in history; and theology benefits from integrating the empirical data researched by the social sciences in its task of explaining and understanding revelation in the specific historical circumstances, and addressing the emergent challenges.³² Thus theology is enabled to discern the signs of the times correctly. The signs of the times are events in society, history, and culture which are so important that faith would be weak or even dead if believers had nothing to say about them. Such events are empirically observable and thus are objects also of the social sciences.

This mutual relationship between theology and social sciences is not only academic. It implies that politics is a combination of wisdom, prudence and art or technique. No Catholic eager to serve his or her country in politics must believe that religious enthusiasm alone is enough to be a good politician. Politicians also need good political philosophy, skills, and knowledge. Nor, should they think, on the other hand, that the skill of speaking well in public and other political techniques are sufficient, in order to shape the community in a morally positive way. Religious wisdom and sound philosophy are required too. It also implies that the hierarchy are well advised to concentrate their official documents on theological principles while leaving the technical solutions to the specialists in the field: “The Church [understood as hierarchy] does not have technical solutions to offer.”³³

2.1. Relevance

For the methodology of Catholic social teaching and the reflection on it in Catholic social thought, it is important to establish which of the three disciplines has the greatest weight. The practical implication of this seemingly theoretical exercise is immense. All baptized Christians partake of the three offices of Christ: the prophetic, the priestly, and the royal (or pastoral)

³⁰ FR, n. 98.

³¹ See Daniel K. Finn, ed., *Empirical Foundations of the Common Good: What Theology Can Learn from Social Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Michael Horace Barnes, ed., *Theology and Social Sciences* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); Robert Jared Staudt, “Christopher Dawson on Theology and the Social Sciences,” *Logos* 12 no. 3 (2009): 91-111.

³² See Staudt, “Christopher Dawson,” 101.

³³ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n.9. Perhaps also, because infrequent, the problem is not technical but spiritual and moral.

office. As prophets, Christians raise their voice to denounce social injustice, exploitation of the poor and oppression of the weak as abominations and sins against God's will. As priests, they strive for a life of holiness, and call others to it by showing, in word and deed, what the high calling in Christ implies. As kings, queens or shepherds, Christians are challenged to find constructive models that develop and foster justice, freedom, peace, and charity in a positive way. They are called to contribute to the good government of their communities. Over the last years, the Church has been strong in denouncing injustice and calling to holiness. However, there is a lack of positive and constructive models of social organization and institutional design. It is always easier to point out what is wrong than to develop what is right, and it is even more difficult to put what is right into practice. Prophecy and priestly calling to holiness correspond essentially to the theological level, whereas a constructive model of practical application requires both a sound sectorial (political, economic, social) philosophy and a set of skills and knowledge.

At first glance one would assume theology to be of paramount importance. However, given the specific character of Catholic social teaching, and especially the challenge of the royal office, it is philosophy or, more precisely, the philosophical mediation of the biblical principles that should have the greatest intellectual weight and influence in Catholic social thought. The cause for this is that the text of the New Testament is not an immediately applicable social, political or economic program. This is for several reasons. First, the canonical gospels underscore personal duties of an individual ethical character. This, among other elements, distinguishes the Gospel from the Law of Moses that contained a series of prescriptions which regulated the political and community life of the Jewish people, and thus clearly belong to social (structural) ethics. Mosaic Law also prescribed norms that we would categorize as civil laws in our contemporary legal systems. Jesus, in contrast, called his disciples to follow him and enter through the narrow door into the kingdom of Heaven through personal holiness and justice that surpassed that of the scribes and Pharisees.³⁴ Personal holiness also demands social concern out of justice and charity, but Jesus's audience were nearly exclusively the marginalized and politically powerless. The post-paschal Church was not in any position to influence, let alone change the social and political structures of the Roman Empire.³⁵ Consequently, nowhere in the four canonical gospels does Jesus attempt to enact civil laws or directly change social structures, with the exception of divorce, which he abolishes in the moral sphere. However, the Gospel contains many implications for social life that have exercised massive influence on the collective imaginary of Christians. Suffice it to mention the description of the Final Judgment, the new commandment of love and the parable of the Good Samaritan. All of these teachings are directed to individuals (each one is rewarded or condemned individually for individual deeds; each one is personally called to love; and the Samaritan acts alone), even though they do not exclude the idea of acting together. In this sense, the logic of the call to follow Christ inspired the first Christian community in Jerusalem to share their goods and care for the widows. After Constantine had abolished the cult of the Roman Emperor and granted religious freedom, the main obstacle for Christian involvement in political life was removed, and Christian values could develop their social potential.

Secondly, the virtue of charity, the center of Jesus's moral teaching, is not immediately applicable as a social principle or law. Attempts to do so in the past have failed, frequently degenerating into totalitarianism and oppression. The first social principle for a political community or

³⁴ See Matthew 5:20.

³⁵ See Brian L. Hebblethwaite, "Sozialethik," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, edited by Gerhard Müller, vol. 31 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 497-527, 498.

a nation is not charity but justice, as already the Stoics saw. In turn, justice, once established by law, needs charity to temper it. Otherwise, the legal system becomes harsh and inhuman.³⁶ That was the special contribution of Christian faith over the centuries: a gradual penetration of Western legal systems with the notion of human dignity that is more a question of charity than of justice.

Thirdly, the fact that natural law plays such a central role in the tradition of Catholic social thought demonstrates what was said above: that neither the gospel nor charity in the tradition were considered immediately applicable as political-social programs. Natural law is an ethical system that is accessible to reason. The Catholic social tradition, especially in modernity, has resorted to natural law as an argument, thus manifesting its conviction that God has not revealed a civil law (or other immediately applicable political norms) but moral law, and has left the ordering of society to human intelligence and care.³⁷ In doing so, the human intellect should be guided by the principles revealed in the Bible and the living Tradition of the Church, that illuminate our minds when searching for a sound philosophy and interpreting the facts and data gathered by the social sciences. This explains the changing and fluctuating nature of the Church's social teaching: the perennial principles of Revelation need to be applied to shifting historical circumstances. Thus not only their specific formulations change but also their contents, implications, and consequences.

For all these reasons, philosophy (political, economic, social philosophy) carries the day. In any case, according to the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, theology plays an essential role also in the social teaching of the Church. Christian revelation adds specifically Christian elements to a merely philosophical ethics, in particular the dimension of charity that has its greatest manifestation in the Cross of Christ. The "virtues of the Cross" cannot be found in any pagan catalog of virtues. Thomas Aquinas referred to the Cross as his book where he learned to identify himself with Christ, to love what Christ loved on the Cross: obedience, patience, love, poverty in the midst of contempt, dishonor, loneliness, hunger, thirst, and pain of all kinds; to despise what Jesus despised on the Cross: hatred, arrogance, greed, human fear, etc.³⁸ *Fides et Ratio* emphasizes the idea:

The crucified Son of God is the historic event upon which every attempt of the mind to construct an adequate explanation of the meaning of existence upon merely human argumentation comes to grief. . . . The wisdom of the Cross, therefore, breaks free of all cultural limitations which seek to contain it and insists upon an openness to the universality of the truth which it bears . . . Of itself, philosophy is able to recognize the human being's ceaselessly self-transcendent orientation towards the truth; and, with the assistance of faith, it is capable of accepting the "foolishness" of the Cross as the authentic critique of those who delude themselves that they possess the truth, when in fact they run it aground on the shoals of a system of their own devising.³⁹

The Cross is thus of great importance also for the social teaching of the Church, not only because it is a continuous call to protect the innocent against oppression, but because it is an intellectual key

³⁶ See Martin Schlag, "'Iustitia Est Amor': Love as Principle of Social and Economic Life?," *Acta Philosophica* 1, no. 21 (2012): 77-98.

³⁷ See Benedict XVI, Speech in the German Parliament, September 22, 2011; http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin.html

³⁸ See Thomas Aquinas, *The Apostles' Creed*, Article 4; <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/Creed.htm#6>

³⁹ FR, n. 23.

to the realization that Christ does not allow himself to be reduced to and shut into any human system. Again and again we strive to domesticate Christ, and squeeze him into political structures of our own making. His love, however, is like a continuous earthquake that shakes us and forces us out of our settled, conventional ways. He does not allow us to take refuge in comfortable human constructions: he always asks for more love. Here we return to the prophetic and priestly offices that challenge and spur on, and thus precede and accompany, the constructive task of the royal office.

The fluctuating and historical character of the social teaching of the Church has already been alluded to. This is the second methodological element that *Fides et Ratio* brings to the social teaching of the Church.

3. *Fides et Ratio Confirms the Historical Dimension of Catholic Social Teaching*

During the twentieth century, theology made a Copernican turn from the Suarezian method of propounding unchangeable universal truths to a deeper understanding of the development of the mystery of salvation, thanks also to John Henry Newman's insights into the development of Christian doctrine.⁴⁰ Actually, that movement had a remote predecessor in late Iberian scholasticism. Melchor Cano, for instance, in his *De locis theologicis*, lists sacred and profane history as one of the auxiliary sources of theological knowledge.⁴¹ Certainly, for Cano, history only supported the correct understanding of the revealed truth; it did not constitute a source of revelation of its own. But Cano also discovered that faith in a dogma presupposes the historical fact of the existence of the Pope or the legitimacy of the Council that proclaimed it. Theology became aware of history.

In a more recent context, it was Romanticism, the historical and materialist dialectics of Hegelian and Marxist philosophy in the secular sphere, and Newman's theology in the theological sphere, which in the nineteenth century paved the way for the conviction that ideas we believe in are alive and well if they develop over time. If they do not develop, they are dead and our faith is dead too. Tradition not only is compatible with development but requires it. Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.

Explaining the changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council, Benedict XVI contrasted a hermeneutics of discontinuity and rupture with the correct hermeneutics of reform. Continuity in the principles is compatible with discontinuity in their application to concrete circumstances. A paradigmatic case is religious freedom.

Freedom from government interference in religious questions is an important element of modern political philosophy and constitutional reality. In proclaiming it at the Second Vatican Council, the Church corrected some of her positions, and in so doing, has returned to her roots.⁴²

Before Benedict XVI, however, John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* had strongly emphasized the importance of history for faith:

God's Revelation is . . . immersed in time and history. Jesus Christ took flesh in the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4); . . . The truth about himself and his life which God has entrusted to humanity is immersed therefore in time and history; . . . For the People of God,

⁴⁰ See Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17-29.

⁴¹ See Melchor Cano, *De locis theologicis*, edited by Jaun Belda Plans (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2006), 551-663.

⁴² See Benedict XVI, Speech December 22, 2005; http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html

therefore, history becomes a path to be followed to the end, so that by the unceasing action of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 16:13) the contents of revealed truth may find their full expression. . . . History therefore becomes the arena where we see what God does for humanity. God comes to us in the things we know best and can verify most easily, the things of our everyday life, apart from which we cannot understand ourselves.⁴³

Of course the pope is not preaching historical relativism. What John Paul II wants to express is the development of revealed truths under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the sense that he sketches elsewhere in the encyclical:

As an understanding of Revelation, theology has always had to respond in different historical moments to the demands of different cultures, in order then to mediate the content of faith to those cultures in a coherent and conceptually clear way.⁴⁴

We can say that *Fides et Ratio* proposes not relativism but “relationalism,” in the sense that it encourages putting the Gospel into relation with different cultures. This does not weaken the Gospel but makes it authentic in the expressions typical of the respective culture, its geographical place and historical circumstances. Thus “relationalism” brings out the full splendor of the Gospel’s truth.

In the specific case of the social teaching of the Church, the political experience of centuries tells us that recourse to ultimate truths in politics can be quite dangerous. Jean Bodin had already intuited that the order of values in political ethics is inverted vis-à-vis that in individual ethics. In individual ethics, God’s grace and religious truth occupy the first place, then come family, friends, and other spiritual values. Individual ethics places bodily needs (food, house, clothing, etc.) at the bottom of the hierarchy. However, for politics the order is the other way around: it is not the government’s task to decide on matters of faith, or to impose a certain form or any worship of God, but its fundamental task is to ensure the satisfaction of basic material needs, as well as peaceful and just coexistence in freedom.⁴⁵ In other words, in modern political philosophy, the government’s task is limited to procuring the temporal common good, whereas the highest questions of faith and religion are left to freedom of conscience. This does not exclude the possibility of public morality. Quite to the contrary, the temporal common good is not a materialistic notion but presupposes a core of freely shared values.⁴⁶

Such insights, as well as an understanding for the decisive importance of history, entered Catholic social teaching with the encyclicals *Pacem in Terris* of St. John XXIII and *Centesimus Annus* of St. John Paul II. They overcame “socio-political essentialism” and replaced it with “idealistic pragmatic institutionalism.” This requires some explanation: In the nineteenth century, Neo-scholasticism had recovered the natural law method that can work for individual ethics. Human nature remains stable over the millennia. All persons of all times are made up of soul and body, are guided by passions and heart, suffer hunger for truth and goodness, fear death and desire to love and be loved. Such consistent anthropological parameters allow us to perceive the natural ends of our human nature that we achieve in the virtues as habits of choice.

⁴³ FR, n. 11-12.

⁴⁴ FR, n. 92.

⁴⁵ See Martin Kriele, *Einführung in die Staatslehre: Die geschichtlichen Legitimitätsgrundlagen des demokratischen Verfassungsstaates* (Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln: Kohlhammer, 2003), 50-53.

⁴⁶ See Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996), 3-28.

In contrast, how could we use this method for the State or other collective entities? There are some failed attempts of Catholic social thought in the past to deduce socio-political norms from the putative essence of political bodies (therefore socio-political “essentialism”). As a human body has only one head, so the body politic should have only one head. Thus monarchy was held by some to be *the* Catholic form of state. As a human body (Latin: *corpus*) is an organism composed of organs that are “incorporated” into a cooperative whole, in the same way *the* Catholic form of organization was thought to be corporativism, in which society was structured vertically and by authority, not democratically and horizontally.⁴⁷ These ideas, however, did not prepare Catholics intellectually to resist totalitarianism.

It was from the political and social experience of the Anglo-Saxon world that modern Catholic social thought learned a perhaps humbler but more effective path: to rely on the experience of what works for the common good of nations (idealistic pragmatism). It is a path of trial and error that led to the British political institutions, and inspired the fathers of the American constitution to distrust systems that depend too much on the virtuosity of the rulers. Instead they created systems of mutual control and division of power; they guaranteed individual rights that limit government, and included the governed in the government. The institutions of the modern liberal constitutional state of law with its systems of social protection for the excluded and marginalized have gained the trust of the vast majority of people, as is demonstrated by massive streams of migration to such nations. Migrants are voting with their feet. Recent studies have made us understand better that the determining factors for the wealth and prosperity of nations are their political and economic institutions.⁴⁸ Either these are inclusive in the sense that they manage to distribute political and economic power more or less equitably; or they are extractive: all the wealth is siphoned off by a small elite of powerful people who reserve to themselves the money for education and health.

3.1. Relevance

The emphasis that recent philosophy, theology, and also the papal Magisterium place on the historical dimension of truth, when translated into the Church’s social tradition, seems to indicate the path of idealistic pragmatic institutionalism also for Catholic social teaching.

This concurs with the program of Joseph Ratzinger to save the positive elements of the political and social project of the Enlightenment (human rights, religious freedom, popular sovereignty, democracy, etc.) from its self-destruction by having cut off its Christian roots. This was part of his wider intellectual effort during his pontificate to broaden the concept of reason, and to reconcile faith and reason. In his famous speech at Subiaco, after praising the achievements of modernity as fruits of the Enlightenment, he said that the enlightened philosophies of modernity

are characterized by the fact that they are positivist and, therefore, anti-metaphysical, so much so that, in the end, God cannot have any place in them. They are based on the self-limitation of rational positivism, which can be applied in the technical realm, but which when it is generalized, entails instead a mutilation of man. It succeeds in having man no longer admit any moral claim beyond his calculations and, as we saw, the concept

⁴⁷ See Rudolf Uertz, *Vom Gottesrecht zum Menschenrecht. Das katholische Staatsdenken in Deutschland von der Französischen Revolution bis zum II. Vatikanischen Konzil (1789–1965)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), 199–250.

⁴⁸ See primarily Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York: Crown Business, 2012).

of freedom, which at first glance would seem to extend in an unlimited manner, in the end leads to the self-destruction of freedom.⁴⁹

In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI applied this consideration to the social teaching of the Church in a way that clearly reminds us of the importance that John Paul II attributed to history in *Fides et Ratio*. Building on the doctrinal heritage of his predecessor, Benedict XVI develops it to make room for the modern state, and at the same time to save political reasoning from its perversion, from blindness and ideological closure. To determine the relationship between the Church, on the one hand, and the State and society, on the other, more precisely, Benedict XVI resorts to the relationship between faith and reason.

We have seen that the formation of just structures is not directly the duty of the Church, but belongs to the world of politics, the sphere of the autonomous use of reason. The Church [understood as hierarchy] has an *indirect duty* here, in that she is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run.⁵⁰

It is extremely important that Pope Benedict XVI spoke of an “indirect duty” (*officium intermedium*). A few lines earlier in the same encyclical, the pope had written:

[Faith] . . . is also a purifying force for reason itself. From God’s standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly. This is where Catholic social doctrine has its place: *it has no intention of giving the Church power over the State.*⁵¹

The words I have highlighted clarify what Benedict XVI intended with the expression “indirect duty.” It amounts to revoking the theory of “indirect power” (*potestas indirecta*) of the Magisterium of the Church over the sphere of temporal politics that had been prevalent since the sixteenth century up to the Second Vatican Council.⁵² In the mind of Benedict XVI, the Magisterium must not aspire to power over the State, neither directly (this was the medieval *plenitudo potestatis* of the pope) nor indirectly (the popes only exercise political power if the Christian princes do not comply with Catholic moral principles). This does not imply a complete separation or mutual indifference of the spiritual and temporal spheres. Quite to the contrary. Pope Benedict XVI described the mutual relationship and interdependence of faith and reason, Magisterium and society clearly in his speech in Westminster Hall in 2010. After rejecting the idea that religion as an organized social body that is distinct from the political legislative authorities could enact laws or intervene directly in political decisions, Benedict XVI declared that the role of the Christian religion in society consists rather in helping to

⁴⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, Speech in Subiaco, April 1, 2005; Appendix I in Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith*, 161; online <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/cardinal-ratzinger-on-europe-s-crisis-of-culture.html>

⁵⁰ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 29 (emphasis added).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, n. 28 (emphasis added).

⁵² In a nutshell, the *potestas indirecta* doctrine meant that the popes had the right to proclaim the general moral principles for political organization that the Christian monarchs were then obligated to implement with legal coercion. See Martin Schlag, *The Business Francis Means: Understanding the Pope’s Message on the Economy* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 3-5.

purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles. This “corrective” role of religion vis-à-vis reason is not always welcomed, though, partly because distorted forms of religion, such as sectarianism and fundamentalism, can be seen to create serious social problems themselves. And in their turn, these distortions of religion arise when insufficient attention is given to the purifying and structuring role of reason within religion. It is a two-way process. Without the corrective supplied by religion, though, reason too can fall prey to distortions, as when it is manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person. Such misuse of reason, after all, was what gave rise to the slave trade in the first place and to many other social evils, not least the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century. This is why I would suggest that the world of reason and the world of faith – the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief – need one another and should not be afraid to enter into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilization.⁵³

It is worth highlighting what the Pope points out: faith and reason need each other, and therefore also “secular rationality” needs the Church in order to be preserved from secularism and obstinate ideological closure. Faith leaves “secular rationality” unimpaired, and thus, grants space to the modern state with its greater sensibility for the importance of institutions and legal order. However, living faith needs public space because faith that is exercised in deeds of justice and charity is essentially also public and social. Here again we note the interplay between perennial principles that are continuous lines in time (in this case, the Christian distinction between the temporal and the spiritual sphere, and simultaneously the conviction that the spiritual sphere possesses moral, not political ascendancy over the temporal one) with the varying forms of specific historical forms of their application.

Since the 1980s, religions have been growing in public relevance.⁵⁴ Never since the Enlightenment has there been so much public debate for and against religion. This despite the fact that in the USA the number of “nones” is rising. The reason that many of the interviewed persons give for self-identifying as “nones” is what they consider to be the incompatibility of faith and science.⁵⁵ Such an argument seems to confirm the assumption by Charles Taylor that we live in an “immanent frame,” in other words, in a cultural mindset which holds itself capable of explaining everything solely by referring to innerworldly criteria.⁵⁶ Transplanted into the political system, the immanent frame turns into a secularism that excludes religion from the public sphere. Paradoxically, however, this form of secularism makes itself incomprehensible. In the measure that secularism destroys religiosity, the anti-religious stance of secularism becomes incomprehensible. If there is no enemy left, against what is secularism fighting? Secularism seems to be a kind of negative religious notion because without religion secularism itself is nothing.⁵⁷ Besides, the growing number of people with mental health

⁵³ Benedict XVI, Address September 17, 2010; http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100917_societa-civile.html

⁵⁴ See José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1-63.

⁵⁵ “Nones” are people who affiliate with no organized religion, and therefore check the box “none” (no religious affiliation) in surveys. See the research at the Pew Research Center <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/14/the-factors-driving-the-growth-of-religious-nones-in-the-u-s/>.

⁵⁶ See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 594-617.

⁵⁷ See Niklas Luhmann, *Funktion der Religion* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1982).

issues seems to indicate that materialistic “freedom of choice,” even against God’s moral law, does not deliver the true freedom it promises. All it does is abandon people to themselves and their own devices. A person in the desert who can go in any direction but does not know which path to take is not free but lost. If she does not know where to go, of what avail is the emancipation from constraint? Western society has destroyed the “fetters” of traditional marriage, of unconditional respect for unborn life, of fertility, of embeddedness of business and finance in local communities, and now that we think we are free, many feel like Goethe’s young Werther: the only way out seems to be suicide. Fortunately, there are other ways out, and a new form of secularity in a post-secular world is developing that is open in an a-thematic, post-critical way to transcendence that has acquired the attractiveness of something new waiting for discovery.⁵⁸ The number of “dwellers” who are institutionally at home in a church or a conceptually integrated world-view is diminishing, but the number of “seekers” who search for happiness, meaningfulness, authenticity and truth is growing. These people want unbiased openness also to religion, and if they have the chance of meeting authentic witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, will also be able to discover that same Jesus Christ in his body, the Church.

At least in Europe, there has been a further element that has forcefully irrupted into society: Islamism and Islamist terrorism. It has shattered the comfortable post-modern consensus of exclusion of religion from the public sphere. In nations like France that have opted for *laïcité négative* – that is a radical separation of state and religion – the consensus consisted in granting equal irrelevance to religion. All religions were considered equal because all religions were equally irrelevant.⁵⁹ No religion was (and is) allowed to show adherence through symbols, prayers, gestures in public and in a public capacity. This consensus will not last because it is built on repression. Some react violently under the instigation of Islamist demagogues who demand the application of Shari’a law also in Europe. Moderate and spiritual Muslims reject and criticize these attempts as deeply unjust and oppressive.⁶⁰ They are right in doing so, and have received some judicial support, but also opposition from cultural relativists. In any case, the debate has opened awareness for the existence of meta-positive legal systems and modes of citizenship based on a higher loyalty to God. Identity and belonging to a nation can be confirmed and legitimized, not weakened, by exposing the law of the land to critical scrutiny from the viewpoint of faith.⁶¹ Here is ample space for the dialogue between faith and reason at the service of justice and love in society of which Pope Benedict XVI spoke. Christian faith, with its tenet of strict compatibility of faith and reason, can render an extraordinary service, also in an inter-religious perspective. Here I see one of the great points of relevance of *Fides et Ratio*, and especially its insistence on historicity, in the future.

The idea of saving our society from its own self-destruction leads us to the third contribution of *Fides et Ratio* to the methodology of Catholic social teaching, that is, the importance of culture.

⁵⁸ See *Secularisms in a Postsecular Age? Religiosities and Subjectivities in Comparative Perspective* edited by José Mapril, Ruy Blanes, Emerson Giumbelli, and Erin K. Wilson (London: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2017).

⁵⁹ See particularly Pierpaolo Donati, *Oltre Il Multiculturalismo. La ragione relazionale per un mondo comune*. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2008).

⁶⁰ See for instance Elham Menea, *Women and Shari’a Law* (London: Tauris, 2016).

⁶¹ Interesting and controversial is Rowan Williams’s essay, “Civil and religious law in England: a religious perspective,” in *Islam and English Law: Rights, Responsibilities and the Place of Shari’a*, edited by Robin Griffith-Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 20–33.

4. *The Centrality of Culture in Fides et Ratio*

Fides et Ratio stresses the importance of culture. Little wonder, considering that John Paul II can be called the “pope of culture.” Culture was a concern and a passion of his. In his last book, *Memory and Identity*, he dedicated a chapter to nation and culture.⁶² His concept of culture is rooted in the Bible narratives of creation. In Gen. 1:28 John Paul II discovers “the earliest and most complete definition of human culture. To subdue and have dominion over the earth means to discover and confirm the truth about being human, about the humanity that belongs equally to man and to woman.”⁶³ The world is entrusted to our humanity as gift and task. The mission is to accomplish the truth about ourselves in order to structure the visible world according to truth. To illustrate this idea, John Paul II quoted his own speech to UNESCO:

Man lives a really human life thanks to culture. Human life is culture in this sense too that, through it, man is distinguished and differentiated from everything that exists elsewhere in the visible world: man cannot do without culture. Culture is a specific way of man’s “existing” and “being.” Man always lives according to a culture which is specifically his, and which, in its turn, creates among men a tie which is also specifically theirs, determining the inter-human and social character of human existence.⁶⁴

One of the ties that unite us is the nation we live in:

The Nation is, in fact, the great community of men who are united by various ties, but above all, precisely by culture. The Nation exists “through” culture and “for” culture, and it is therefore the great educator of men in order that they may “be more” in the community. It is this community which possesses a history that goes beyond the history of the individual and the family.⁶⁵

Not surprisingly, culture takes a prominent place also in *Fides et Ratio*. The specific aspect under which John Paul II deals with culture in his encyclical on faith and reason is the encounter of the Gospel with the different cultures of the world. The Gospel when it is correctly inculturated does not alienate the respective culture but purifies and perfects it. Any culture that is worthy of the human person is an open culture, open to truth, and therefore open to Christ the Logos. When a culture accepts Christ its beauty is enhanced, and it becomes more capable of leading the people who share that culture to happiness:

The Gospel is not opposed to any culture, as if in engaging a culture the Gospel would seek to strip it of its native riches and force it to adopt forms which are alien to it. On the contrary, the message which believers bring to the world and to cultures is a genuine liberation from all the disorders caused by sin and is, at the same time, a call to the fullness of truth. Cultures are not only not diminished by this encounter; rather, they are prompted to open themselves to the newness of the Gospel’s truth and to be stirred by this truth to develop in new ways.⁶⁶

⁶² See Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Personal Reflections* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 83–7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶⁴ John Paul II, Address to UNESCO, June 2, 1980, <http://inters.org/John-Paul-II-UNESCO-Culture>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ FR, 71. The similarity with the words of Pope Benedict XVI at his opening address to the Fifth General Assembly of the Latin American Bishops’ Conference CELAM in Aparecida in May 2007 is startling.

The orientation toward culture is an impulse to the methodology and approach of Catholic social teaching. It is again founded in the shift introduced by the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which bears the subtitle “The Church in the Modern World.” This is not just an empty combination of words. Leo XIII had regarded the relationship between Church and nation in an analogous way to the relationship between two sovereigns who regulated their common interests with a treaty, called concordat. Perhaps, had *Gaudium et Spes* been promulgated in his time, he would have called it “The Church and the Modern State.” According to the old model before the Council, a nation opened its territory to the Church that could enter with her institutions (hierarchy, religious orders), create dioceses and chaplaincies under the protection of the government. The nation promised conformity with the moral teachings of the Church that were to be implemented by law. In return, the Church supported the monarch and his government, educated believers to be exemplary subjects to the sovereign, and to pray for him. It was the system of union of “throne and altar” that had emerged from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, even though it was first established as a principle in the “peace of religion” at Augsburg in 1555: *cuius regio eius religio*. It was a top-down model of imposed evangelization. *Gaudium et Spes*, in contrast, chose a different method that is expressed also in the words “the Church *in* the world.” The Second Vatican Council chose a model of evangelization that goes from bottom up or from inside out. Modern societies are democratic and pluralistic, without authorities that could impose a certain lifestyle and moral convictions from above. The Church realized that the time had come for the laity to give living witness to their faith as leaven in the middle of the world. Lay Christians are citizens of the world in their own right, without any need of “penetrating” the world from outside. They are already there, in the efforts and struggles of humanity to move forward in the improvement of society and culture. They need to be aware that they are protagonists of history, and therefore are liable to its contingencies and uncertainties that they must tackle in their own responsibility without expecting directives and ordinances from the clergymen that these cannot give. Christian lay people are called to illuminate the structures and realities of this world with the light of Christ and warm society with his love, while fully respecting the relative autonomy of earthly affairs. In this endeavor, laws certainly play an important role but they are not the only issue at stake. It is the much wider issue of culture that Christians should have in mind when they try to share the good news of redemption and the joy of the Gospel. This new evangelization is a process of cultural transformation.⁶⁷

4.1. Relevance

These ideas resonate deeply with Pope Francis. In his *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Joseph Ratzinger points out that in Europe, especially the Netherlands, *Gaudium et Spes* was received with relief as a kind of “countersyllabus”⁶⁸ that initiated a phase of reconciliation with modernity that ushered in “the certainty of attaining perfect unity with the present world” and a “transport of adaptation.”⁶⁹ In Latin America the development was different. “The period of optimistic agreement with the modern spirit, with its progress and with its offer of development for underdeveloped countries, came almost abruptly to an end. [. . .] Latin America can find no promise of help for its problems in enlightened progress.”⁷⁰ In enlightened progress it sees the cause of its misery.

⁶⁷ Francis Cardinal George, *The Difference God Makes: A Catholic Vision of Faith, Communion, and Culture* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), 38-41.

⁶⁸ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1987), 381. The *Syllabus* was an appendix to the encyclical *Quanta Cura* by Pius IX, in which he condemned a series of claims by the modern liberalism of his times, see DH 2901-2980.

⁶⁹ Ratzinger, *Principles*, 383.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 384.

The problem of Latin America was and is, in fact, not reconciliation with the spirit of the modern era, identification with the ideology of Western Europe and the United States. [. . .] the spirit of liberalism and capitalism fostered by the Anglo-Saxon powers had become an even more painful slavery, for these only apparently liberated countries, which, as a result, could certainly not find their identity in this spirit or regard it as their “return home.” By a kind of inner necessity, therefore, the optimism of the countersyllabus gave way to a new cry that was far more intense and more dramatic than the former one.⁷¹

The cry for liberation gave birth to the theology of liberation, but also to a moderate form, the theology of the people. It has influenced Pope Francis and modern Catholic social teaching. With the theology of liberation, the theology of the people shares the radical wish to liberate the poor from suffering. It also states the inseparability of faith and social justice. However, it differs in so far as it is not Marxist, includes everybody, also the rich and businesspersons if they pursue the common good, and conceives of the preferential option for the poor as an especially important aspect of Christian charity and evangelization, not as a comprehensive epistemological precondition for all of theology.⁷² One of the scholars who is given credit for developing the theology of the people and of having strongly influenced Bergoglio is Lucio Gera. He explicitly refers to the centrality of culture and history in the concept of the People of God, Christian life, and evangelization. Similarly to John Paul II, he stressed the interrelation between culture, people, ethos and history. Awareness of a common culture constitutes a people. For Gera, belonging to a people or nation means sharing in the same culture by concretizing that culture through particular historical political decisions. Culture is therefore a political-ethical concept that stems from the human tendency to live together in society.⁷³ These positions are typical of the theology of the people, and we find them in the social teaching of Pope Francis. As Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Bergoglio was keenly in favor of the inculturation of faith. Inculturation, explained Bergoglio, means finding the right balance between proclaiming the Gospel message to a nation with “all the authenticity and the strength that characterizes the Word of God; and at the same time with all the authenticity and the strength of the cultural reality of the nation itself.”⁷⁴

Francis echoes these and similar thoughts in his pontificate, especially in his paradigmatic apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, on the joy of the Gospel. In the following quotation, the Pope correctly modifies Thomas Aquinas’s dictum that grace presupposes nature. Grace presupposes culture. So many aspects of human life that seem to be natural, down to speaking, walking upright and living together, are in reality cultural achievements. The same is true for higher human and religious activities:

The People of God is incarnate in the peoples of the earth, each of which has its own culture. The concept of culture is valuable for grasping the various expressions of the Christian life present in God’s people. It has to do with the lifestyle of a given society, the specific way in which its members relate to one another, to other creatures and to God. Understood

⁷¹ Ibid., 385.

⁷² See Martin Schlag, *Business*, 67–71.

⁷³ *Escritos Teológico-Pastorales de Lucio Gera*, vol 1: *Del Preconcilio a la Conferencia de Puebla (1956 – 1981)*, edited by Virginia Raquel Azcuay, Carlos Galli, and Marcelo González (Buenos Aires: Agape Libros – Facultad de Teología UCA, 2006), 605–659 and 724f.

⁷⁴ See Mariano Fazio, *El Papa Francisco: Claves de su pensamiento* (Madrid: Rialp, 2013), 59–60 (my translation). Fazio quotes Jorge Mario Bergoglio, *Religiosidad popular como inculturación de la fe en el espíritu de Aparecida*, in *A la luz de Aparecida* (Buenos Aires: Arzobispado de Buenos Aires 2009), 18.

in this way, culture embraces the totality of a people's life. Each people in the course of its history develops its culture with legitimate autonomy. This is due to the fact that the human person, "by nature stands completely in need of life in society" and always exists in reference to society, finding there a concrete way of relating to reality. The human person is always situated in a culture: "nature and culture are intimately linked." Grace supposes culture, and God's gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it.⁷⁵

These words strongly emphasize the summons of the laypeople by the Second Vatican Council to be the protagonists of evangelization. The task of healing, elevating and perfecting culture is primarily assigned to those who are there, who create, shape and develop culture from the inside. Of course, the clergy too play an important role in sustaining the lay Christians in their faith, in sacramental and prayer life, as well as fostering missionary zeal in them. Sometimes, certainly, the clergy themselves are active in cultural activities too, if their talents, inclinations and time allow them to do so. However, by proclaiming the universal calling to holiness and apostolate, the Council has made it clear that the main task corresponds to all the people of God together, especially the laity characterized by the secular nature of their vocation:

the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.⁷⁶

The big challenge in Latin America is the creation of a culture that respects the rule of law and builds the institutions that spread political and economic power equitably. This, as far as I can see, would be the great contribution of Catholic social teaching to the theology and life of the people. Work and bread, the dignity of earning one's own livelihood, is one of the central intentions of Pope Francis.

5. Conclusions

I hope to have shown that the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* is a perhaps unexpected source of methodological orientations for Catholic social teaching. The impulses and guidelines it gave in its time were not new but they developed the tradition of social teaching into which the encyclical is inserted. This tradition had received a decisive new turn during the Second Vatican Council that was a constant reference point for John Paul II. He took some of the Council's teachings further, clarified their meaning, and rejected interpretations that were incompatible with the Catholic faith.

⁷⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: LEV, 2013), n. 115.

⁷⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, n. 31.

As regards Catholic social teaching, three points have emerged as contributions of *Fides et Ratio* to the epistemology and methodology of the social magisterium. According to *Gaudium et Spes*, Catholic social teaching is essentially a service of the shepherds of the Church that affects social life indirectly by making a free offer of sense and faith. It is a hermeneutical service of integrating social reality into a meaningful whole that includes the principles of Christian love and justice, truth and freedom. *Fides et Ratio* reinforces this by rejecting fideism also in matters of social morality.

The encyclical further clarifies that the method of Catholic social teaching is tripartite and requires the cooperation of at least three disciplines: theology, philosophy, and social sciences. Because of the shifting character of history, Catholic social teaching too fluctuates. It is sensitive to time and place, to history and culture. This opens Catholic social thought to those political and economic institutions that have been most successful historically and empirically in endowing the whole population with the possibility of earning their own bread. Christians are citizens of this world, called to bring about progress and prosperity through the work of their hands and minds. A way to do this is to create inclusive institutions and defend the rule of law. Without this, Catholic social teaching will not contribute to justice and peace but to stagnation, confusion, and disintegration. This would not be what John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis hoped for when they proposed integral human development as aim of Catholic social teaching. *Fides et Ratio* was and is a milestone along the way.