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# MARITAIN ON "THE COMMON GOOD": REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT

Kibujjo M. KALUMBA

**ABSTRACT:** *Two major theses underly Maritain's position in The Person And The Common Good: the thesis that society is whole, and the thesis that, as persons, humans are not parts of, but wholes within, society. In light of these, he criticizes three major approaches to the common good: individualism, communism, and totalitarianism, and proposes an alternative candidate for the concept. To this candidate I propose a succinct characterization which I show to have universal as well as ecclesiastical significance.*

**RÉSUMÉ:** *L'auteur examine les deux thèses de Maritain dans La personne et le bien commun: que la société est un tout; et que les personnes humaines n'en sont pas des parties mais sont elles-mêmes des tous dans la société. Puis l'auteur caractérise et discute l'alternative que propose Maritain face aux trois approches qu'il combat: l'individualisme, le communisme, le totalitarisme.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In his *The Person And The Common Good*<sup>1</sup>, Jacques Maritain seeks to establish an alternative to what he takes to be the three main approaches to the common good, conceived of as society's *telos*.<sup>2</sup> These approaches are: "bourgeois individualism",

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1. Jacques MARITAIN, *The Person And The Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966). I shall henceforth refer to this book as *PCG*.

2. Throughout this paper society's "*telos*" is used as the single word for society's "purpose", "goal", "end", "reason for existence", "good", "function", etc. Maritain seems to use these and related words interchangeably. See, especially, *PCG*, pp. 49-50. In the sense in which Maritain seems to use "the common good" in *PCG*, an approach's common good appears to be whatever that approach takes to be society's *telos*.

“communistic anti-individualism”, and “totalitarian or dictatorial anti-communism and anti-individualism”.<sup>3</sup>

Two major theses seem to underly Maritain’s critical assessment of the three approaches. The first thesis is that society is not a mere collection of individuals; it is an ontological whole. The second thesis is that, as persons<sup>4</sup>, human beings are not parts of society; they are wholes within society.

It is a fundamental thesis of Thomism<sup>5</sup>, that the person as such is a whole. The concept of part is opposed to that of person. To say, then, that society is a whole composed of persons is to say that society is a whole composed of wholes.<sup>6</sup>

It is in light of the above two theses that Maritain proceeds to evaluate each of the three approaches. I will begin with his critical assessment of individualism.

According to individualism, society is an artifact created by humans for the exclusive purpose of serving their individual needs.<sup>7</sup> Hence, qua society’s *telos*, the common good is, for the individualists, nothing but the collection of the particular goods of each individual.<sup>8</sup>

The individualistic approach is unacceptable to Maritain for at least two reasons. First, Maritain seems to urge, individualism fails to do justice to the holistic nature of society enunciated by the first thesis. Because it is an ontological whole, society, in Maritain’s view, has a *telos* unreducible to the goods of its constituents. Hence, he seems to think that, by identifying society’s *telos* with its constituents’ goods, individualism denies society and unreducible *telos* and, by doing so, robs it of its holistic nature.<sup>9</sup> Second, Maritain seems to contend, individualism undermines what he takes

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3. In chapter 5, these approaches are referred to as the “three conflicting forms of social and political materialism” (*PCG*, p. 91). In the “Introductory” (chapter 1), the approaches are posed as “opposite” or “contrary errors”, with bourgeois individualism posed as the extreme opposite of the other two. The approaches will henceforth be designated “individualism”, “communism”, and “totalitarianism”, respectively.

4. Throughout *PCG*, especially in chapter III, Maritain stresses “the metaphysical distinction between individuality and personality” (*PCG*, p. 13). A human being is, for Maritain, an individual in his/her entirety, just as s/he is a person in his/her entirety. “There is not in me one reality, called my individual, and another reality called my person. One and the same reality is, in a certain sense an individual, and, in another sense, a person. Our whole being is an individual by reason of that in us which derives from matter, and a person by reason of that in us which derives from spirit” (*PCG*, p. 43). Maritain’s view is that it is only as a person that a human being is a whole. As an individual s/he is a part, and as such, his/her good is inferior to that of society. Such being the case, “[i]t is ... in the nature of things that social life should [for the sake of the whole] impose numerous restraints and sacrifices upon his life as a person considered as a part of the whole” (*PCG*, p. 69). This view obviously entails a paradox, something Maritain readily acknowledges and tries to wrestle with (*PCG*, pp. 77-79).

5. Maritain is a self-acclaimed Thomist. Thus “Thomistic personalism” is the best description he can think of for the position he takes in *PCG*, p. 13.

6. *PCG*, pp. 56-57.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

9. I am rendering explicit a line of reasoning which seems to be implicit in the claim that identifying society’s *telos* with the collection of the particular goods of its individuals “would dissolve society as such to the advantage of its parts, ...” (*PCG*, p. 50).

to be a duty entailed by the second thesis; "the duty" to treat the person as a whole. I will explain.

Since s/he is a whole, the person, in Maritain's view, ought to be treated as a whole.<sup>10</sup> Part of treating a person as a whole, Maritain seems to think, consists in providing him/her with the necessary requirements for the pursuit of his/her good qua person. Due to "the law of superabundance inscribed in the depth of [his/her] being ...,"<sup>11</sup> the person, Maritain urges, requires the communion of knowledge and love;<sup>12</sup> a requirement which, in his view, can only be satisfied fully within a genuine community.<sup>13</sup> But what kind of society does individualism prescribe for the attainment of its *telos*? An artificial construct, to which persons are bound mechanically — the exact opposite of community!<sup>14</sup> So, instead of prescribing a genuine prerequisite for the person's pursuit of his/her good, individualism, in Maritain's view, prescribes a counterfeit. Hence the contention that the approach undermines "the duty" to treat the person as a whole.

Maritain sees communism as "a kind of economic theocracy;"<sup>15</sup> he takes it to be committed to the view that appropriate control of the productive process is the key to everything socially desirable. It is Maritain's opinion that this view has constrained communism to reduce society's principal work (society's *telos*) to that of controlling the productive process. This reduction, Maritain urges, has blinded communism to the goods of the person; those requirements which are necessary for the individual to pursue his/her good as a person.<sup>16</sup> But, as we have seen, Maritain takes provision of these requirements to be part of "the duty" to treat the person as a whole. In his view then, communism neglects an essential aspect of this "duty". This is the main reason why he considers it unacceptable.

In Maritain's view, totalitarians model society after the "biological and animal" kind of whole in which the constituent elements are mere parts; parts which are totally subservient to the whole and its *telos*.<sup>17</sup>

There are at least two reasons why Maritain finds the totalitarian model unacceptable. First, the model is obviously in direct conflict with his second thesis. Second, it constitutes an outright violation of "the duty" to treat the person as a whole which, as we have seen, he takes to be entailed by the same thesis. Let me elaborate.

10. "[T]he person, as person, requires to be treated as a whole in society" (*PCG*, p. 58). "Whole", in the sense it is used in *PCG*, is not only opposed to "part", but also carries the Kantian sense of "end"; the sense of a being which ought to be cared for for its own sake. So, as a whole, i.e., as an end, a person, in Maritain's view, ought to be cared for not only for the sake of society, but also for his/her own sake. This is the essence of "the duty" to treat the person as a whole. See note #7, *PCG*, pp. 17-18, and note #28, *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50. Maritain refers to Kant explicitly in note #7.

11. *PCG*, p. 48.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

13. Community seems to be necessary, in Maritain's opinion, for the kind of "dialogue in which souls really communicate" (*PCG*, p. 42).

14. See *PCG*, pp. 92-93, 101.

15. *PCG*, p. 96.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 50-51.

We have already noted that, as used in *PCG*, “whole” carries the Kantian sense of “end”.<sup>18</sup> So, for Maritain, as we have seen in the same note, *qua* whole in the sense of “end”, a person ought to be cared for not merely for the sake of society but also for his/her own sake. As we have noted, this constitutes the essence of “the duty” to treat the person as a whole. But, in the totalitarian model, the person is totally subordinated to society and its *telos*. Contrary to the said “duty”, s/he cannot be said to be cared for for his/her own sake. S/he is cared for, if ever, solely as a means for the attainment of society’s overarching goals to which s/he is totally subordinated. It should be clear why the model is taken by Maritain to be an outright violation of the said “duty”. It might be worth mentioning here that, writing in the aftermath of World War II, Maritain could not forget to point to the dangers inherent in totalitarianism’s subordinationism. “Only yesterday, across the Rhine”, he reminds the reader of Nazi Germany, “we saw to what atrocities a purely biological conception of society can lead.”<sup>19</sup>

Maritain’s alternative candidate is intended to satisfy at least two requirements. First, it is meant to be society’s *telos* as a whole, a *telos* that is unreducible to the particular goods of its constituents. In his view, as we have seen, to propose a reducible *telos* is to rob society of its holistic nature. Second, the candidate is intended to be a *telos* which incorporates the good of the person as part of its essence. The incorporation is meant to ensure that in pursuing the candidate, society directly intends the good of the person as an end, i.e., as something pursued for its own sake, not merely for the sake of society and its goals. In this way, the candidate is meant to secure respect for “the duty” to treat the person as a whole — whole in the sense of “end” — by an in-built sort of mechanism. It is Maritain’s view, as we have seen, that, in one way or another, each of the other three competing approaches fails to do full justice to this “duty”. The two requirements, I take it, are what Maritain has in mind when he insists that the common good should be “common to both the whole [society] and the parts [the individuals] into which it flows back and which, in turn, must benefit from it.”<sup>20</sup>

In this paper, I will not contest the validity of Maritain’s two requirements. Regardless of how their imposition is motivated in *PCG*<sup>21</sup>, the requirements will be accepted as a reasonable tenet of a philosophical framework combining Personalism’s emphasis of the importance of the person with the holistic-teleological, Thomistic tradition.<sup>22</sup> My efforts will be concentrated on characterizing Maritain’s candidate succinctly. The reasons for the succinct characterization will be clear in the last section of the paper. Before presenting Maritain’s candidate, I should point out two of this paper’s “limitations”.

18. See note #10 above.

19. *PCG*, p. 68.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

21. Avoiding what Maritain takes to be the shortcomings of the three approaches seems to be the main motive for imposing the requirements in *PCG*.

22. I have already noted (note #5 above) that “Thomistic Personalism” is Maritain’s description for his position in *PCG*.

First, given the fact that Maritain does not use "the common good" univocally,<sup>23</sup> I should specify the sense with which the concept is used in this paper. My concern is exclusively with what he calls "the common good of civil society".<sup>24</sup> It is his definition of this alone that is examined, and to which a succinct characterization is suggested. Second, I have not undertaken a thoroughly systematic study of Maritain's views on the common good. *The Person And The Common Good (PCG)* has been my major, though not exclusive, source of information. Am I for that reason presenting an incomplete picture of Maritain's views on the concept? I think not. Not if *PCG* is what Maritain takes it to be: "a brief and ... sufficiently clear synthesis of our position on a problem about which there have been numerous ... misunderstandings."<sup>25</sup> I will now proceed with Maritain's candidate.

### I. MARITAIN'S CANDIDATE

To understand Maritain's candidate correctly, we will need to keep in mind that it is intended to satisfy two requirements: that of being society's unreducible *telos*, and that of incorporating within its essence the good of the person. But Maritain is not unaware that every purposive entity's good is ultimately its good existence, i.e., its good life. Hence, it is reasonable to think that he wants his candidate to be society's unreducible good life, a good life an essential component of which is the good life of the person. "But what is society's good life?" people are bound to ask. "In what does the good life of the person consist?" people will want to know. What these questions suggest is that, were it to be proposed in this form, the candidate would be too abstract to serve as a useful guide for humanity. So, Maritain sees the need to propose a practical equivalent to this abstract common good.<sup>26</sup> Naturally, he identifies this practical equivalent with the set of all conditions necessary for society's good life.<sup>27</sup> For to pursue these conditions is to pursue the abstract common good, and to pursue the abstract common good is to pursue these conditions. This, at any rate, seems to be his reasoning. But since the good life of the person is an essential component of his abstract common good, Maritain makes sure that his practical equivalent incorporates the practical equivalent to this component, i.e., the set of all conditions specifically necessary for the good life of the person. Thus, the candidate I am about to present turns out to be a set containing two kinds of societal elements:<sup>28</sup> those which Maritain takes to be necessary for the good life of society in general, with no specific regard for its individual members, and those which he takes to be specifically necessary

23. Maritain for instance opposes "the immanent common good of the universe" (*PCG*, pp. 17-18) to its "separated common good" (*PCG*, p. 18). Also, among other common goods, he speaks of "the uncreated common good of the three Divine Persons", as well as "the common good of the intellects" (*PCG*, p. 83).

24. *PCG*, p. 54.

25. See the "Acknowledgements" page (*PCG*, p. 7).

26. Unless otherwise qualified, "the common good" will henceforth stand for this practical equivalent.

27. It is not clear if the conditions are supposed to be sufficient for society's good life as well.

28. In this paper, "(societal) element" is given the broadest possible extension. The only things not included in its extension are the individuals and society's structure. What is meant by the latter will soon be clear.

for the good life of the person. It might be helpful to quote the entire text of the candidate at this point.

Thus, that which constitutes the common good of political society is not only: the collection of public commodities and services—the roads, ports, schools, etc., which the organization of common life presupposes; a sound fiscal condition of the state and its military power; the body of just laws, good customs and wise institutions, which provide the nation with its structure; the heritage of its great historical remembrances, its symbols and its glories, its living traditions and cultural treasures. The common good includes all these and something much more besides — something more profound, more concrete and more human. For it includes also, and above all, the whole sum itself of these; a sum which is quite different from a simple collection of juxtaposed units. ... It includes the sum or sociological integration of all the civic conscience, political virtues, and sense of right and liberty, of all the activity, material prosperity and spiritual riches, of unconsciously operative hereditary wisdom, of moral rectitude, justice, friendship, happiness, virtue and heroism in the individual lives of its members. For these things all are, in a certain measure, *communicable* and so revert to each member, helping him to perfect his life of liberty and person. They all constitute the good human life of the multitude.<sup>29</sup>

The first kind of elements, it would seem, are all those included in the first complete sentence of the quote. For these seem to be not only the guarantors of society's continued existence, but also the indicators of its social, economic, cultural, and political health. These elements, I take it, are the ones intended to ensure the unreducibility of the candidate. I am taking the second kind of elements to be all of those mentioned from the third occurrence of "includes" to the end of the quote. These, it would seem, are taken by Maritain to be of such a character that their assimilation by the individual is necessary, if s/he is to lead an authentically good life of the person. These, I take it, are the *communicable* ones intended to guarantee that the common good "includes within its essence, ... the service of the human person"<sup>30</sup>, i.e., the good of the person. So, assuming that its members actually play the roles ascribed to them, we have in Maritain's set a candidate whose very composition ensures its satisfying the two requirements imposed by its author.

Do the set's members actually play the roles Maritain takes them to play? This is a question to which there are no easy answers. Any plausible answer calls for deep probing into the nature of societal and human needs, something best pursued in a separate paper. So, rather than pursue this issue any further, I will concentrate on characterizing Maritain's candidate succinctly. As I have already said, the reasons for the succinct characterization will be clear in the last section of the paper.

## II. MARITAIN'S CANDIDATE: A SUCCINCT SCHEMA

From what has been said so far, Maritain's candidate would seem to be composed of societal elements exclusively. More precisely, If each "e" is taken to stand for a

29. *PCG*, pp. 52-53.

30. *PCG*, p. 29. The same is expressed in *PCG*, pp. 51 and 53.

qualifying element,<sup>31</sup> and "n" is taken to represent the number of such elements, one could get the impression, from what has been said thus far, that the set  $Cg_1$  exhausts the essence of Maritain's candidate.  $Cg_1: \{e_1, e_2, e_3, \dots, e_n\}$ .<sup>32</sup>

Is  $Cg_1$  the set Maritain has in mind? I think not. As will be clear, this set constitutes an incomplete characterization of his candidate. I will elaborate.

If society "needs" the elements of  $Cg_1$  for its good existence, it should follow that it "needs" these elements' harmonious interaction as well. Nothing is desirable about a collection of elements if they don't *actually* interact harmoniously. In other words, as it stands,  $Cg_1$  is incomplete; it leaves out the harmonious interaction between its elements which is an essential prerequisite of society's good life. What is needed then, to complete  $Cg_1$ , is a way of incorporating this lacking component into it. I take it that Maritain agrees with this assessment of  $Cg_1$ , and that what follows is his way of incorporating the lacking harmony into the set.

Maritain is not unaware that harmonious interaction between things which, like societal elements, have diverse tendencies cannot be expected unless they are appropriately organized, i.e., unless they are arranged to form a viable structure. So, he sees the need to give structure to the elements of the common good. This is why, I take it, he incorporates into his definition those things — the just laws, wise institutions, etc. — "which provide the nation with its structure". But not any structure will do for Maritain. He has in mind *an appropriate* kind of structure; appropriate in at least two ways. First, he wants a structure which is adequate for the task of *integrating* all the common good's elements in a way which ensures their desired harmonious interaction.<sup>33</sup> Second, he wants this structure to be capable of ensuring the vitality of those elements to which he attaches central significance; elements such as justice, friendship, and moral goodness. Without justice and moral goodness, Maritain is convinced, the common good cannot be called "the good of a people", it could as well pass for the good "of a mob of gangsters and murderers".<sup>34</sup> As for friendship, Maritain takes it to be "the very life-giving form" of the body politic.<sup>35</sup>

To summarize, Maritain feels the need to complete  $Cg_1$  by incorporating into it an extra component which is not a societal element, namely an appropriate kind of

31. A qualifying element is one which is necessary either for society's good life in general, or for the specifically good life of the person.

32. To simplify things, we will assume that the set constitutes an exhaustive list of all the qualifying elements.

33. Maritain wants the elements of the common good to constitute an *integrated whole*. As he has told us in the text of the candidate, he does not see the common good as a "simple collection of juxtaposed units"; it is for him a "whole [integrated] sum". For another context in which Maritain stresses the character of the common good as an integrated whole, see Jacques MARITAIN, *The Rights Of Man And Natural Law*, trans. Doris C. Anson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 10. This work will henceforth be cited as *RMNL*.

34. PCG, p. 53. See also *RMNL*, p. 10.

35. Jacques MARITAIN, *Man And The State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 10<sup>th</sup> impress., 1962), p. 10. This work will henceforth be cited as *MATS*. See also *RMNL*, p. 36. It is Maritain's view, that of the three elements (justice, friendship, and moral goodness), justice stands out as "the crucial need of modern societies" (*MATS*, p. 20). See also pp. 10, 211. Again, for Maritain, justice is a function of society's underlying structure(s). See, for instance, *MATS*, pp. 23-24.



social structure.<sup>36</sup> In light of this observation, I will let “st” stand for that appropriate kind of structure, incorporate it into  $Cg_1$ , and represent Maritain’s complete candidate for the common good as the set  $Cg_2: \{e_1, e_2, e_3, \dots, e_n, st\}$ .

But why take the trouble to characterize Maritain’s candidate succinctly? Why make the extra effort to highlight structure as an essential component of the succinct characterization? These questions should be in order now that the final, succinct characterization of the candidate has been presented. The answer to the first question lies in the universal significance of  $Cg_2$ , the end result of our efforts. The answer to the second question is to be sought in the importance of an ecclesiastical requirement which presupposes structure as an essential component of  $Cg_2$ . As will be clear,  $Cg_2$ ’s significance and the said requirement are not unrelated. The latter is the result of universally instantiating the former to the Church’s concrete situation. It is to this significance and to that instantiation that I am devoting the last section of this article.

### III. $Cg_2$ : SIGNIFICANCE AND ECCLESIASTICAL INSTANTIATION

It was stated earlier on that my exclusive concern was with what Maritain calls the common good of civil society. In addition, it was pointed out that Maritain characterizes his position in *PCG* as Thomistic Personalism. It should, hence, not be amiss to say that  $Cg_2$  is a characterization of the common good of civil society within the Thomistic Personalist framework. But, I think,  $Cg_2$  is much more than this. As I will try to show, the set constitutes the schema to be followed by any attempt to characterize the common good, as society’s *telos*, regardless of the attempt’s philosophical framework. Let me elaborate.

To be plausible, any candidate for the common good, as society’s *telos* should be “concrete”, i.e., in addition to being specific in content, it should be recognizable and pursuable by the average person. This requirement is necessary if we are to avoid prescribing for humankind a *telos* which is bound to condemn it to either perplexity or purposeless endeavors. Maritain’s way of concretizing his candidate, we have seen, consists in presenting it as a set of specific societal elements. Personally, I can think of no better way to accomplish this task. I am, hence, of the view that, to be plausible, any candidate for the common good, as society’s *telos* will need to be expressed as a set of specific elements. But, just like  $Cg_1$  above, any such set will be lacking the essential harmonious interaction between its elements, and a way will have to be devised to introduce this essential component. Maritain, we have observed, introduces the component by incorporating an appropriate kind of structure into  $Cg_1$ . This, it appears to me, is the only viable way to introduce harmonious interaction between a variety of things which, like societal elements, have diverse tendencies. I am of the view then, that any plausible candidate for the common good, as society’s *telos* will

36. Following convention, I am taking a given society’s predominant mode of ownership of the means of production to be the essential determinant of its social structure. On this view, we can speak of three possible kinds of social structures: socialism (public or collective ownership of the means of production predominates), capitalism (private ownership predominates), and mixed economy (socialist and capitalist modes exercise, more or less, the same degree of predominance).

need to be presented as a set of specific societal elements plus an appropriate kind of structure, i.e., as a set isomorphic to  $Cg_2$ . This, then, is the universal significance of  $Cg_2$ . It is the schema to be followed by any plausible attempt to characterize the common good, as society's *telos*. This is true, as I have tried to show, regardless of the attempt's philosophical framework. The reasons behind our efforts to reach a succinct characterization of the common good should now be clear. Underlying these efforts was the desire to spell out the universal significance of that succinct characterization. Hopefully, this has been accomplished. We will now proceed to explicate the reasons behind our endeavors to highlight structure as an essential component of the succinct characterization.

The common good, we are told by Joseph Gremillion, "forms the bedrock of [official] Catholic social doctrine ...".<sup>37</sup> It should follow from the conjunction of  $Cg_2$ 's universal significance shown above and Gremillion's observation just cited that the Church ought to follow schema  $Cg_2$  in its efforts to construct its social bedrock. The inferred requirement (henceforth requirement  $R_1$ ) cannot be taken lightly by the Church. It is the basis of an important ecclesiastical requirement. I will explain.

It has been emphasized that an appropriate kind of structure is an essential component of  $Cg_2$ . Combined with  $R_1$ , this position entails the requirement (henceforth requirement  $R_2$ ) that the Church incorporate an appropriate kind of structure into its social bedrock.  $R_2$  is an important ecclesiastical requirement. But in order to appreciate its importance, we should first clear one crucial problem.

We noted above that it is conventional to speak of three possible kinds of social structures, namely socialism, capitalism, and "mixed economy".<sup>38</sup> Such being the case, the following problem is bound to ensue:  $R_2$  requires that the Church incorporate an appropriate kind of structure into its bedrock. Which one of the three possible kinds of structures should the Church consider appropriate? Clearly,  $R_2$  does not provide us with any clues as to how this problem is to be tackled. My suggestion follows.

It appears to me that the above problem cannot be handled in a purely *a priori* manner. The reason is that the world's regions in which the Church operates differ in a diversity of ways. Such being the case, a kind of structure which is appropriate for one region need not be so for another. This is the more true given the fact of extreme imbalances in the distribution of wealth in some regions of the world. Like Maritain, the Church definitely wants a social structure which is capable of ensuring the vitality of justice.<sup>39</sup> It doesn't seem implausible to say that while distributive justice is likely to call for socialism in regions of extreme economic inequalities, capitalism might

37. Joseph GREMILLION, *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 33. Gremillion is a former Secretary for the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace.

Even a cursory reading of the so-called *aggiornamento* documents confirms Gremillion's observation. See, for instance, *Mater et Magistra*: #37, #78; *Pacem in Terris*: #136, #138; *Gaudium et Spes*: #71; *Populorum Progression*: #23. The common good, as society's *telos* is clearly what is at stake in the cited texts.

38. See note #36 above.

39. "It [the social order] must be founded on truth, built on justice, and animated by love; in freedom it should grow every day toward a more humane balance." *Gaudium et Spes*, trans. Walter Abbot, #26d. Emphasis added.

prove to be the way to go in regions with more even economic distribution.<sup>40</sup> It would seem then that the best way to tackle the problem is to proceed in an *a posteriori* way, i.e., to draw a given region's appropriate kind of structure from the nature of the region's concrete historical circumstances. Here, then, is the solution I am suggesting to the problem before us (henceforth, the solution is to be called suggestion *Sg*): for any given region, whichever one of the three kinds of structures is most attuned to the nature of the historical circumstances of that region, that is the kind of structure the Church should consider appropriate for that region. Given *Sg*, I can think of two reasons for the claim of  $R_2$ 's ecclesiastical importance.

The first reason is rather theoretical; it has to do with the nature of the Church itself. The Church is catholic in the sense of being universally adaptable. But, in light of *Sg* above, it is this very catholicity that  $R_2$  is asking the Church to confirm. For given *Sg*,  $R_2$  must now be read as a call on the Church to introduce its bedrock whatever kind of social structure is most attuned to the nature of the region in which the Church finds itself operating. Clearly, this is a call to universal adaptability. Herein, then, consists the theoretical importance of  $R_2$ . Given *Sg*,  $R_2$  is a call on the Church to confirm its catholicity by adapting one of its basic tenets (the common good) to the world's regional differences. We have an ecclesiastically valuable call in  $R_2$ .

The second reason is more practical; it has to do with the hierarchy's stance on the issue of contextual theologies. More specifically, I have in mind the former's treatment of Latin America's liberation theologians.

Relying on a "Marxist analysis"<sup>41</sup> of their societies, the liberation theologians have come to see the socialist kind of structure as the only alternative which can significantly ameliorate the predicament of the millions of their poverty-stricken compatriots.<sup>42</sup> So, convinced that concrete love for the neighbor entails effective liberating action on behalf of the poor, the theologians have joined the impoverished in their struggle for a socialist kind of structure.<sup>43</sup> This is the perspective from which they are doing theology. As Gustavo Gutierrez has put it, their theology consists of speaking "the word of the Lord to all men [and women] from that position of solidarity."<sup>44</sup>

40. Maritain, among others, seems to be of this view. See, for instance, *MATS*, Chapter I, Section IV. As we shall see, Latin America's liberation theologians are basically saying the same thing. Their call for socialism is premised on the fact of the extreme economic inequalities in their region.

41. Liberation theologians carefully dissociate themselves from Marxism as a comprehensive, materialistic philosophical system. They insist on their sole use of "Marxist analysis" as the best tool for analyzing the dynamics of capitalist society. For details on this point, see, for instance, Jose Miguez BONINO, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 96-99.

42. Juan Luis Segundo has been very explicit on the option for socialism. For him one of the most acute human problems of the Latin American continent is "the option between capitalist and socialist societies". Segundo leaves not doubt in his reader's mind that, for him, socialism is the option for Latin America. See, Juan Luis SEGUNDO, "Capitalism—Socialism: A Theological Crux", in Gustavo GUTIERREZ and Claude GEFERÉ (eds), *The Mystical and Political Dimensions of the Christian Faith (Concilium 96)*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1974), p. 106. This book will henceforth be referred to simply as *Concilium 96*.

43. Liberation theologians contrast abstract love with concrete love. The latter, they insist, entails effective action on behalf of the loved one. See, for instance, Gustav GUTIERREZ, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad INDA and John EAGLESON. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973), pp. 275-277.

44. Gustav GUTIERREZ, "Liberation, Theology and Proclamation", in *Concilium 96*, p. 58.

Hierarchical reactions to liberation theology have ranged from attempts to alienate its propounders, to blanket condemnations.<sup>45</sup> These reactions, it would seem, are largely responsible for the current tension between the hierarchy and the theologians of liberation.<sup>46</sup> Are these reactions justifiable? Some of them might be justifiable, others might not be. I am not in a position to give a fair verdict on each individual case. All I want to say is that the current situation calls for an honest dialogue aimed at reconciling the two parties, and that there is a good basis for such a dialogue. That basis, as will soon be clear, is  $R_2$ .

We have already observed that, given  $S_g$ ,  $R_2$  must be read as a call on the Church to introduce whatever social structure is most attuned to nature of the region in which the Church finds itself operating. For the entire Latin American Church this call entails a common task: the task of discerning the most suitable kind of social structure for the region. This is so because the Latin American Church cannot be expected to introduce what it does not know. How is the question of discernment to be tackled? This proves to be the pressing now.

The *a posteriori* procedure we have advocated calls for the sort of discernment which draws the most suitable kind of structure for Latin America from the region's concrete historical circumstances. But these circumstances can be the subject of differing interpretations. Such being the case, different sectors of the Latin American Church can be expected to take opposing stances on the issue of the most suitable kind of structure for the region. Who is to pronounce the final verdict? No one can claim to be an infallible judge on an issue of this kind. The only realistic option, it appears to me, is for the leadership (the hierarchy) to engage all the concerned parties in an honest dialogue. This will give the parties a chance to critically engage each other's position. Hopefully, a viable compromise will ensue from this critical engagement. There is, of course, no guarantee that this will happen, but the stakes are too

45. Attempts to alienate liberation theologians as a group include the deliberate exclusion of their leading members from the list of the theological *periti* allowed to attend the Third General Conference of the Latin American episcopate. See Moises SANDOVAL, "Report From The Conference", in John EAGLESON and Philip SCHARPER (eds), trans. John Drury, *Puebla And Beyond: Documentation And Commentary*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 31. Blanket condemnations of liberation theology by high placed Church officials seem to dominate the scene in Latin America. This is the picture I get from reading MacEoin's article. MacEoin has reported that according to a survey of the leading Brazilian newspapers, 202 of the 232 articles on liberation theology in a six-year period are condemnatory. And, as he goes on to say, nearly all the 202 articles are by archbishops and bishops, making stereotype "Marxist" condemnations of liberation theology. See Gary MACEOIN, "1492-1992: To bury Columbus or to praise him", *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, September 21, 1990, pp. 11-12. To balance the picture, we will mention the names of some members of the Brazilian hierarchy (bishops) who are sympathetic to liberation theology. Paulo Evaristo Arns (Sao Paulo), Moacyr Grechi (Rio Branco, Acre), Jose Maria Pires (Joao Pessoa, Paraiba), Mauro Morelli (Caxias), Valfriedo Tepe (Ilheus, Bahia). According to liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, the above-mentioned are "somehow linked to liberation theology". From an interview of Boff by Deborah El-Dabh, *NCR*, March, 17, 1989, p. 26.

46. The tension between the hierarchy and the theologians of liberation is, perhaps, best reflected by what is currently going on between the Vatican and the Latin American Conference of Religious (CLAR). While the Vatican insists on imposing its agenda and leadership on CLAR, CLAR, a steadfast defender of liberation theology, continues to fight back the imposition. See Leslie Wirpsa, "Vatican Clampdown on CLAR continues", *NCR*, February 15, 1991, p. 14. See also, by the same author, "Latin American religious protest Rome actions: CLAR statement comes after two years of growing tensions", *NCR*, October, 11, 1991, p. 19.

high to leave things to mere chance. One thing is certain, however, namely that the liberation theologians are one of the concerned parties which should be engaged in the dialogue. As we have seen, they are already committed to the struggle for what they honestly believe to be the most appropriate kind of structure for their region.

It should now be easy to state  $R_2$ 's practical importance. Read in light of  $Sg$ ,  $R_2$  constitutes a good basis for an honest dialogue between the hierarchy and the theologians of liberation. Apart from being necessary for the correct discernment of Latin America's appropriate kind of social structure, the dialogue promises to constitute the beginnings of the desirable process of reconciliation between the two parties.

The reader should now be in a position to see why we highlighted structure as an essential component of Maritain's candidate. We did this so that we could be in a position to deduce  $R_2$  from instantiating  $Cg_2$  to the Church's unique situation. It should be clear to anyone who has followed the line of reasoning in this section that  $R_1$  is the result of instantiating  $Cg_2$ 's universal significance to the Church's situation, that  $R_1$  entails  $R_2$ , and that the entailment does not hold without the assumption that structure is an integral part of  $Cg_2$ .

In conclusion, our efforts to characterize Maritain's candidate succinctly have not been in vain. We have seen that  $Cg_2$ , the end result of our efforts, is a universally significant schema. We have endeavored to show  $Cg_2$ 's special significance for the Church. Its instantiation to the Church's situation, we have argued, results into  $R_2$ , an ecclesiastically important requirement. We have not only shown  $R_2$ 's theoretical value, we have also demonstrated its practical fecundity.<sup>47</sup>

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47. I am very grateful to Dr. Parker English of Ball state University, Department of Philosophy. He read earlier versions of this paper and provided very constructive criticisms.