



Which engagement? Issues of dialogue and cultural mediation between two societies, spiritual and secular, in their permanent tension

Comments on Fr. Bryan Hehir's paper

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Fr. Hehir's paper proposes an overall assessment of the way in which the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) engaged the world from Leo XIII (*Rerum Novarum*) through John Paul II (*Centesimus Annus*, CA) and Pope Francis (*Laudato Si'*, LS) in order to draw out implications for *how* the Church can most helpfully engage the contemporary world situation. It is a remarkable synthesis of the social teaching's history, accompanied by significant biographical notes of some popes in their historical context. This excursus, while not entering into the specific issues, argues in favor of a fundamental continuity, and, in some respects, the complementarity of the CST from Leo XIII through Pope Francis, within the tripartite framework of pre-conciliar, conciliar and post-conciliar experience of the Catholic community and its hierarchical institutions.

My comments are not intended to be a critique of the well documented and suggesting paper of Fr. Hehir. I wish only to offer a few stimuli to deepen some substantial issues. In particular I am interested in raising questions about the links between CST and human sciences on one side, and about the different accents, silences, changes, and even discontinuities, that can be detected in the development of the CST on the other side.

Fr. Hehir's paper presents its arguments, looking back and ahead, by assuming the central role of the perspective set forth by *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) whose principal contribution was precisely to locate the social teaching in a theological and ecclesiological framework. This perspective puts emphasis on the *teaching* dimensions – as inspired by the Gospel and the Tradition – so that one can wonder what the CST has learned (and should learn) from the contribution of human history, experience and science.

This way of presenting the CST is perfectly understandable, of course, given the essence of the CST as part of moral theology. What I want to point out is the fact that the Church and the World are seen from a transcendent point of view so that the factual reality is considered in the light of top-down principles without entering into its concrete complex dynamics.[1] To put it bluntly, the paper offers an assessment of the engagement of the Church that is marked by its own definition of the situation, while the CST also contains (bottom-up) efforts to understand how its truths are immanent to the secular reality. In other words, the paper proposes to read CST as a dialogue between Church and world, but actually this dialogue *is viewed from the standpoint of the Church*. The dialogue should provide for an interlocutor who interacts and gives a contribution to the definition of the situation and the possible courses of action, at least as far as the moral principles are concerned. In short, the CST is intended as a *message* to the world, while what the world offers to the Church seems to me left in the shadows. In am thinking, in particular, of the difficult dialogue between hierarchy and laity on moral principles affecting sexuality and family life. Under this aspect Pope Francis seems to make a significant change in discontinuity with the past.

Fr. Hehir recalls us that the “theological statements may be less accessible when sharing Catholic social teaching with civil society, but they provide a powerful *message within* the Church about the universal dignity of each person, and the rationale for the social ministry.”[2] The issue, then, is how to make accessible the message *outside* the Church.

After reading Fr. Hehir's paper, that favors the continuity and complementarity between the various Popes, I have drawn a different conviction, namely that there has been a noticeable change in CST: while the CST from Leo XIII through Pope Pius XII has been predominantly defensive of the flock (due to historical conditions of attack on the Church), from the pontificate of John XXIII onwards the CST has gone on the offensive. The offensive - or, if you prefer, the radical nature of the proposals for changing the world - has

developed into a way getting stronger and stronger from Paul VI (*Populorum Progressio*) through John Paul II and then, above all, with Pope Francis. The encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (CA) should be read as a step in this growing offensive of the Church towards the mundane world after the collapse of Soviet communism.

This 'offensive', this calling into question all the shortcomings, mistakes and injustices of the modern world, especially in its Western version, requires an interpretation. Where is the CST going to? There seems to be an ambivalent attitude. On one side, if we consider issues such as the recognition of human rights and the autonomy of the temporal reality, there appears to be a growing openness towards (Western) modernity. On the other side, the criticism of the mercantile capitalist model is evident, as if the two sides of the coin were independent. This ambivalence deserves to be discussed.

For reasons of space, I will limit myself to a few arguments: (I) the vision that the CST has of secularism within the dialogue between Church and world; (II) the role of cultural mediation between the *kerygma* and the mission of the Christians and the Church; (III) the persistent marginalization of the Third Sector (the world of associations and civil organizations) in the CST; (IV) the need for a growing dialogue between CST and scientific research.

I. Which dialogue between the Church (as mystical body) and the world (as laity)?

Dialogue presupposes two subjects. As recalled by Fr. Hehir, "the acknowledgement of respect for autonomy is one of the pre-conditions for authentic dialogue between Church and world." [3] We must therefore ask whether this indication of the GS has been followed by the Church after Vatican II in its dialogue with modernity.

The Church accepted modernity on two key aspects: (i) the recognition of the right political and economic autonomy of the temporal order, and (ii) religious freedom as a fundamental human right, or better as the foundation of all human rights. In this, the CST has incorporated a certain amount of 'liberalism', while simultaneously warning that this liberal vision presupposes a precise anthropology about human dignity. This anthropology emphasizes the nexus between freedom and personal and social responsibility. For the CST, freedom has specific social functions, e.g., the realization of human dignity and the common good. It should be positive (freedom *for* the good), not only negative (freedom *from* constraints). The CST has come to propose a 'relational anthropology' and a 'relational freedom', which are at odds with many forms of liberalism, e.g., what are called 'emancipatory individualism', 'post-human / trans-human / hyper-human' liberalism. The fact is that, within liberalism, there is a tension towards transcending 'the human' that has Christian roots. In short, in its dialogue with modernity the Church has still to come to grips with what we can call 'Christian liberalism', since the latter conceals within itself ambiguities that need to be made subject to further insights in the light of where humanity is going to.

(i) About the autonomy of earthly realities, Fr. Hehir cites a sentence from *Gaudium et Spes* (GS, #36), according to which the Church appreciates modernity, by seeing a perfect harmony between 'modern man and the desire of the creator'. This statement needs a decodification, because modernity is not the specific addressee in the text. The addressee is 'man' of all times, and in any case the world autonomy is held legitimate under the condition that society recognizes and respects religion.

"If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator." (GS § 36).

".. it must be admitted that the temporal sphere is governed by its own principles, since it is rightly concerned with the interests of this world. But that ominous doctrine which attempts to build a society with no regard whatever for religion, and which attacks and destroys the religious liberty of its citizens, is rightly to be rejected." (*Lumen Gentium* § 36).

What I want to underline is the fact that the ambiguities in the dialogue between the Church and the World are far from resolved. They are a persistent problem that cannot be solved once and for all. The fact is that the term 'modern man' is used in the CST with many different meanings.

Again one wonders what the Church has learned (and will be able to learn in the future) from modern and post-modern civil society (laity).

My opinion on this point is that we must problematize the difficulty that the Church, understood as institution, has in relating itself to both Catholic and non-Catholic laity. The relationship between the role of the hierarchy and the temporal role of lay people (ordinary believers) is clear in theory, where GS claims that the laity have the task of sanctifying secular activities. But it is unclear whether the laity has this task simply as a consequence of baptism or needs a specific mandate of the hierarchy. In fact, in the CST the dualism between the Church as a spiritual society and the Church as institution (internal and intrinsic to temporal realities) is a permanent tension, always to be renewed.

As a matter of fact, Fr. Hehir testifies to this tension when he makes two statements which, when read by a layman like me, may seem quite in contrast with one another. On one hand, he remembers what John Paul II said in his formal statement to King Carlos of Spain: "The Church is a spiritual type of society with spiritual aims, without any desire to compete with civil powers or to deal with material or political affairs which she recognizes with pleasure are not in her competence" (quotation from note 19). On the other hand, Fr. Hehir states that John Paul II "traveled as a head of state, so the visits were never without their secular implications. At times he would defend the local church from pressure or harassment (Poland – the unique example); at other times he would press the church hierarchy to take a stronger stance on human rights (Haiti, an example); at other times his goal was to open doors long closed to the church (Cuba)." Pope Francis also acts as a formidable direct interlocutor of the political and economic powers on the international stage. Is the institutional Church a political actor or not? This is another ambivalence to be clarified.

In the Magisterium of the Church the role of the laity is and remains a problem because of the lack of a clear distinction of responsibilities between hierarchy and laity that causes internal structural tensions to the Church. Tensions tend to get worse the more the laity claims its autonomy. Let me give an example with reference to what happened in Italy in recent years (2015, 2016) when an autonomous committee of lay Catholic has organized a public event ('Family day') to promote the family and family policies. On that occasion not only the Italian Catholic laity did not have the support of the Italian Episcopal Conference, but was explicitly disapproved and disavowed by its General Secretary (as to the President, he remained silent the first time, and opposed the General Secretary the second time). At least in some countries, the autonomy of the Catholic laity is considered under guardianship by Church institutions. In many situations, if the laity is moving independently, the hierarchy does not enhance it, but ignores it or calls it to serve the hierarchy. In the CST, the relationship between hierarchy and laity is far from been clarified in the present historical conditions.

(ii) The problems related to religious freedom have been increasing in proportion to the processes of privatization and subjectivization of faith. With the expansion of the internal forum of the personal faith and the emergence of new spaces of freedom, the need for a new dialogue between the Church and the world has rose quickly.

On this topic discontinuities are evident. Leo XIII (encyclical *Libertas*) stated that "man, by a necessity of his nature, is wholly subject to the most faithful and ever-enduring power of God; and that as a consequence *any liberty except that which consists in submission to God and in subjection to His will, is unintelligible.*" To deny the existence of this authority in God, or to refuse to submit to it, means to act not as a free man, but as one who treasonably abuses his liberty; and in such a disposition of mind the chief and deadly vice of liberalism *essentially* exists. For Leo XIII religious freedom can be *tolerated*, but does not constitute a right.

On the contrary, following the Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*, #1-2), John Paul II wrote that "the source and synthesis of these rights [human rights] is religious freedom, *understood as the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in conformity with one's transcendent dignity as a person.*" (CA #47)

As Fr. Hehir rightly points out, in the 1960s, the theological debate raised the problem of secularization and privatization of faith with great insistence. This debate has persisted until the 1970s (Paul VI) and it was about how much of modern privatization could be accepted by the Church. It touched on topics such as sexual behaviors and life styles, business deals, financial transactions, political vote, work relations, etc. With John Paul II this issue continued and received always the same answer: CST cannot accept the privatization of faith and its consequences for choices in secular matters, while the prevailing trend in all fields of social life, from economics to politics, from culture to science and technology, goes precisely in the opposite direction. The Church's attempt to find a balance between the legitimation of a certain privatization of people's behaviors and the natural law is a persistent problem that would require a dynamic vision of natural law which is still lacking.

II. The problem of cultural mediation between Church and World beyond modernity.

In the last part of the paper, Fr. Hehir deals with the theme of the passage from conciliar to papal engagement. His thesis is that there is a strong continuity and complementarity between John Paul II and Francis, despite their different 'styles'. I think that this is true from a formal point of view. On the substantive side, however, it seems to me that there are substantial discontinuities.

For John Paul II, between theology (dogmatics) and CST there is a *necessary* cultural mediation to be cultivated, which is precisely the field of secularity. This instance becomes secondary with Pope Francis. In any case, it should be noted that in the middle of these two popes there is an innovative contribution of Benedict XVI that cannot be skipped. Pope Ratzinger proposes to CST an unprecedented 'relational turn', although some might argue that it was already implicit in the CST. The novelty is that in *Caritas in Veritate* (CV), Benedict XVI proposes *the category of relation as the central concept to redefine the future of the CST*.

As we know, the reception of this encyclical in the US was problematic, not because of disagreement but because the relational turn was not understood, both theoretically (first part of CV) and in its implications for civil society (second part of CV). In my view, the turning point of which I speak consists in having indicated in the Trinitarian theological matrix the *necessary* and *indispensable interface* between CST and human/social sciences.

This relational turn of Pope Ratzinger has not been ignored by Pope Francis, who, in the encyclical *Laudato Si* (LS), writes:

"Technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems [pollution and climate change], in fact proves *incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things* and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others." (LS 20). "Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain *a proper relationship with my neighbour*, for whose care and custody I am responsible, *ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth*." (LS 70).

"The Franciscan saint [Saint Bonaventure] teaches us that *each creature bears in it- self a specifically Trinitarian structure*, so real that it could be readily contemplated if only the human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile. In this way, he points out to us the challenge of trying *to read reality in a Trinitarian key*." (LS 239), "The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and *the world*, created according to the divine model, *is a web of relationships*. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships. This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfilment. *The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships*, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that Trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop *a spirituality of that global solidarity* which flows from the mystery of the Trinity." (LS 240)

I dare say that, in Pope Francis' LS, relationality is the core of his concept of 'integral ecology'. In his words: "*Since everything is closely interrelated*, and today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an *integral ecology*." (LS #137); "*It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected (...)* It follows that the fragmentation of knowledge and the isolation of bits of information can actually become a form of ignorance, unless they are integrated into a broader vision of reality." (LS #137)

With Pope Francis, the Church goes beyond the dialogue, and casts a radical challenge to Western modernity. This challenge was already contained in John Paul II's CA, but clearly it was expressed with more dialoguing tones.

Compared to Benedict XVI there is a further strong discontinuity if we consider that, while Pope Ratzinger has always supported the need to resume dialogue with the Christian roots of modern Enlightenment, on the contrary Pope Francis asks the Church to take a critical position without appeal towards modernity – equated with sweeping liberalism ('liberism') – to enhance aspects of community and collective human emancipation.

In LS, Pope Francis denounces “the myth of progress” (LS #60) “the ‘myths’ of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market)” (LS #210). He writes: “I propose that we focus on the dominant technocratic paradigm and the place of human beings and of human action in the world.” (LS #101) “If we acknowledge the value and the fragility of nature and, at the same time, our God-given abilities, we can finally leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress” (LS #78).

In denouncing the failure of the myths of modernity, e.g., the myth of progress and the technocratic paradigm, there is nothing new from the standpoint of the principles and statements of the CST. The novelty lies in the fact that the cultural mediation is put aside to give priority to pastoral and missionary action.

Certainly, Pope Francis recalls the need for an ‘inculturation of the faith’ (*Evangelii Gaudium* #68-69). At the same time, however, since “to inculturate the Gospel in countries of other religious traditions, or profoundly secularized countries, will mean sparking new processes that will demand long-term planning” (EG #69), he tells the church to bet more strongly on popular faith (“Popular piety itself can be the starting point for healing and liberation from these deficiencies”, *ibidem*) and the living - I would say literal - announcement of the Gospel.

The CST is brought to the Gospel sources without that cultural mediation should play an essential role. All doctrine is confirmed, but at the same time is set aside to support the action in favor of social equality (“Inequality is the root of social evil”). At the macro level social justice must prevail and, at the micro level, the interpersonal encounter of the good Samaritan should be the exemplary role model. In short, the CST appears to be the *kerygma embodied* in the mission of liberating humanity from all injustice, oppression, exploitation.

The scenario emphasizes the ‘revolutionary’ character of the CST towards modernity that – as Fr. Hehir rightly writes – had a ‘classic’ (Thomist) tone in *Rerum Novarum*. Now CST comes into the open as a radical alternative to a hyper-modernized world that is neither liberal nor socialist (in classical terms), nor consistent with the principles of the CST, and which wants to ‘go beyond’ the human. Whereas the ‘post-modern man’ expresses the desire to get out of history, Pope Francis brings humanity back into history. How can this goal be pursued?

The project has to face a radically post-Christian society that embraces ethics of the ‘new age’ type, in which the distinctions are increasingly experienced as discrimination, and therefore are avoided. Possibly taking that into account, Pope’s request is “to build an ecclesial culture that casts off judgmentalism” (Rev. Robert W. McElroy, auxiliary bishop of San Francisco). Therefore Catholics are given the task to solve an enigma: do they still have the need to draw distinctions between the Christian identity (being/living as Catholics) and the identity of simple human beings (being/living as naturally humane), or not? Clearly, Pope Francis reminds us that people are and become more human to the extent that they live in relation to Christ. But a question remains: do Christians need a new cultural mediation to accomplish a proper way of living or not, given that the old cultural mediation does not work any longer?

I think that, to address this issue, it is necessary to consider the magisterium of the Pope who is in between John Paul II and Francis, e.g. Ratzinger’s answers to this question. To do this would imply recognizing that the ‘social question’ addressed by Leo XIII (the advent of the industrial society, with the confrontation between liberalism and socialism, and the conflicts between social classes), which was the focus of the CST for the whole 20th century, has changed its terms. It has become more and more an ‘anthropological (and cultural) question’ – namely the survival of humanism and the confrontation between religions, in which the issues of human identity in a good society become central. In short, in a globalized society, an increasing number of issues cannot be explained, nor, addressed in terms of mere political and economic factors. The issues of religious and cultural identity take on a new importance to the effects of their social consequences, and the social identity requires a cultural mediation. We must face problems of comparison between religions and cultures on which Pope Benedict had much deliberation. In ‘*Truth and Tolerance. Christian Belief and World Religions*’ (2005), cardinal Ratzinger dealt with these questions: how can Christianity insist it is true in the face of other religions and philosophies making competing claims? Do truth and tolerance inevitably conflict with each other? Does respect for others mean all religions are equally true? Or do all religions ultimately teach the same thing? Are all religions capable of saving their adherents? In ‘*Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam*’ (2007), Pope Ratzinger called on the West to embrace a spiritual rather than political renewal, and to accept the spiritual and moral values that alone can help us to make sense of changes in technology, economics, and society. He emphasized that “*we need to distinguish what is Christian*”.

In other words: given the fact that the belief in the gospel is what identifies Christians with respect to other identities, can we say that the gospel is the foundation of a distinction between Christians and other religious (and cultural) identities in dealing with social issues?

The message of Pope Francis does not take exactly the same road of Pope Ratzinger. For Francis, the gospel is a universal call that does not distinguish Christians from others, because it refers to a nature common

to all human being. In his speeches, Pope Francis claims that mercy is the characteristic that distinguishes Christians, but *at the same time this feature belongs to all human beings as human beings*:

“We Christians believe that Jesus calls us to serve our brothers and sisters, to care for others, regardless of their origin and the circumstances. However, *this is not only a distinguishing mark of Christians, but it is a universal call, rooted in our common humanity as human persons.*” (Pope Francis’ speech at the Harvard World Model United Nations, Paul VI Hall, March 17th, 2016) (Italics mine)

Possibly this is the reason why the cultural mediation is overshadowed in Pope Francis’ teachings. In the light of these considerations, we can now address Fr. Hehir’s assertion that there is a complementarity between the two magisterial styles of John Paul II (CA) and Francis (LS). In his words:

“On the question of how the market economy functions and on its extension through globalization, the major difference of style of engagement between Francis and John Paul II is the way the latter moves his critique into a kind of casuistry, weighing multiple factors, balancing assessments of both the market and globalization in detached fashion. *In brief, prophetic discourse [Francis] and casuistic analysis [John Paul II] can be complementary and bring different sources of strength to magisterial teaching.*” (Italics mine)

This statement can be agreed in principle, but with a few caveats. As a matter of fact also the analysis developed by Pope Francis (LS) is casuistic when, for instance, he deals with ecological issues. But, most important, is the other issue concerning the need for precise distinctions, or not, in order to specify the Christian identity in respect to social issues. It seems to me, that, if John Paul II has developed a casuistic analysis on many moral issues, this was due to his desire to clarify the distinctions (as relations) needed to identify ‘what is the Catholic position’, possibly loosing appeal to a wider audience. Francis’ way of thinking and his prophetic style go beyond the need for distinctions, and therefore can attract those people who do not give much weight to distinctions.

Surely, as Fr. Hehir claims, “a complementary model of these two globalist popes may be a useful contribution to engagement.” However, this consideration cannot ignore the profound differences between the two magisteria, despite their apparent continuity. Reducing the issue only to a difference of ‘styles’ does not give account of the fact that John Paul II is still looking for a dialogue with modernity, through a cultural mediation, while Francis seems to refute the outcomes of modernity, and he does not aim for a new cultural mediation. Rather he looks for a new pastoral scenario.

I would argue that Pope Francis introduces a profound discontinuity with the past by redefining the boundaries between the Catholic Church and the other Christian denominations, as well as with the other religions, on an essentially pastoral plan. This means the opening of a new historical era. The redefinition of the borders takes place by clearly distinguishing between *différence* and *différend*. *Différence* is considered as a set of characteristics that distinguish one thing from another, i.e., a being from another in terms of an *alterity*; otherness exists in nature, because God creates beings as different; the difference is good in itself, it enables the complementary. *Différends* are all things that create conflict since they raise deep contrasts between different opinions and/or interests.[4] While differences allow complementarity, *différends* cannot be reconciled. It remains to be seen if the latter can find a solution of coexistence and concord. By putting emphasis on the medicine of mercy rather than on the weapon of rigor, according to Francis, the social teaching and the new ministry can then be guided by the following three steps.

- 1) Separate *différences* from *différends*: i.e., we must prevent differences (plural opinions and behaviors) become irreconcilable (*différends*). In other words, it comes to avoiding disruptions, as happened at the time of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, when differences were translated into irreconcilable positions.
- 2) Downplay the *différends*: i.e., we must believe that the contrasts and conflicts can find a form of coexistence.
- 3) Deal with *différences* as plural wealth rather than as sources of conflict.

To my mind, there is no doubt that these three guidelines will mark a revolution in the pastoral work of the Catholic Church and, in parallel, in the CST.

III. The Third Sector (the civil associational world) remains in the shadows.

Fr. Hehir's paper devotes much attention to the North American debate about the relationship between state and market. It does not mention the third sector, which is the world of so-called 'intermediate groups' on which the Church has rested and has flourished over the centuries. Certainly we must recognize that the documents of the social teaching focus much on the relations between Church and State, as well as between State and Market, while the Third Sector appears most often in a secondary and auxiliary position, in the issue of relations between the State and Society.

Yet the theme of intermediate bodies was central from Leo XIII to Pius XI (*Octogesima Adveniens*), and it is always returned when the documents of the CST addressed the issue of subsidiarity and solidarity. The topic of the Third sector inside the Church had its apogee with John Paul II, at first in the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici* (CL) (1988) and then in the CA. Subsequently it had further developments with Pope Ratzinger (*Caritas in Veritate*).

The fact is that the issue of civil associations and organizations is a sensitive issue for the Church, at both the theoretical and practical levels. The associative world of the Third Sector is the strength, but also a challenge for the Church. On the theoretical level, the CST can be understood only in the context of a relational vision of society that is not limited to the principles which relate to the State and the Market. On a practical level it implies a continuous confrontation between the Church as an institution and civil society.

Not by chance, in those societal contexts in which the debate is focused primarily on the relationship between State and Market, and on their respective advantages and disadvantages (i.e., within a *lib/lab* configuration of society), as it happens in the US, the world of civil associations – both internal and external to the Church – is considered mainly as an influencer of the public opinion and a funder and organizer of charities, and not as a fundamental autonomous pillar of the Church and society. On the contrary, in those societal contexts where the debate focused upon State and Market is seen as limitative of the richness of society and forgetful of the natural sociability of the human beings, the Third Sector has received new attention and is increasingly regarded as an autonomous and symmetrical pillar in respect to State and Market.

The CA said the most illuminating words in this regard.[5]

“According to *Rerum novarum* and the whole social doctrine of the Church, the social nature of man is not completely fulfilled in the State, but is realized in various intermediary groups, beginning with the family and including economic, social, political and cultural groups which stem from human nature itself and have their own autonomy, always with a view to the common good. This is what I have called the "subjectivity" of society which, together with the subjectivity of the individual, was cancelled out by "Real Socialism" (CA #13)

“It is in interrelationships on many levels that a person lives, and that society becomes more "personalized" [the literal translation would be: ‘and *the subjectivity of society* grows’]. *The individual today is often suffocated between two poles represented by the State and the marketplace*. At times it seems as though he exists only as a producer and consumer of goods, or as an object of State administration. People lose sight of the fact that life in society has neither the market nor the State as its final purpose, since life itself has a unique value which the State and the market must serve.” (CA #49).

Pope Francis has taken up in its own way this perspective.

“Not everyone is called to engage directly in political life. Society is also enriched by a countless array of organizations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban. Some, for example, show concern for a public place (a building, a fountain, an abandoned monument, a landscape, a square), and strive to protect, restore, improve or beautify it as something belonging to everyone. Around these community actions, relationships develop or are recovered and a new social fabric emerges. Thus, a community can break out of the indifference induced by consumerism. These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story which can be remembered and handed on. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences.” (LS #232)

However I have the impression that, when evaluating the CST, the role of the Third Sector does not receive the proper appreciation. The civil associational formations (the so-called intermediate bodies) are considered as sources of *enrichment* for society and the Church, [6] and not as a structural reality that can compete with State and Market institutions. Certainly the teaching of Pope Francis is very attentive to sociality . But his appeal is directed to universal love, centered on Christ, which must continually call into question all the particular ties, even inside the ecclesial institutions, associations and movements. By this way, he reconfirms the ambivalence of the church towards the associative forms that are at once an asset but also a risk of closures.

In the CA John Paul II made an operation similar to that of St. Thomas Aquinas in the lead up to its highest point the balanced sustainability of the ambivalences –both theoretical and practical – between Church and civil society, as well as between human and supernatural realities. This effort has been taken over by Francis, but in him the ambivalences are dissolved in favor of the prophecy. According to him, “It is from the peripheries that will come new contributions, new values, and will also come people capable of renewing the world.” (speech in the Paul VI Hall, November 21st, 2015). Pope Francis’ reforms seem to follow the orientations expressed by Yves Congar, according to which *genuine reforms are realized when the contour shapes the center*. The missionary dimension of the Church becomes the dominant theme in respect to that of sanctification of ordinary work, and in this way is also redefined what is meant by secularity .

IV. *The need for a renewed dialogue between theology and other sciences.*

Many wonder: if the CST is moral theology, how do you justify the fact that the documents of CST contain sociological, economic, political etc. statements which are subjected to the investigation of the respective sciences? Just to give some examples, consider the sentences: “Malfunctions and defects in the Social Assistance State are the result of an inadequate understanding of the tasks proper to the State” (CA 48); “while it is true that an unequal distribution of the population and of available resources creates obstacles to development and a sustainable use of the environment, it must nonetheless be recognized that demographic growth is fully compatible with an integral and shared development.” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, #483); “the social dimensions of global change include the effects of technological innovations on employment, social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social breakdown, increased violence and a rise in new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people, and the loss of identity.” (LS #46); “Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behavior patterns, and the ways it grasps reality (...) It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.” (LS #139) These statements derive and are subjected to scientific scrutiny. They do not stem directly from moral theology.

Therefore it should be made clear that the CST needs a lot of exchanges with all sciences. In most points Fr. Hehir’s paper refers to the fact that, in order to understand the developments of the CST, we must on the one hand consider the transcendent reality of the Church, and on the other hand explore the reciprocal relationships between earthly realities, with their history, and the supernatural realities, with their eternal truths. The definition of the World as “human family living in a historical context that is the subject of redemption” is suitable for this purpose. Today it should be confronted with what happens in the course of historical development at a time when the World is conceived in the sciences as ‘infinitely always possible otherwise’ (Niklas Luhmann). It is with this view that the CST must now compare. In order to be able to conduct this confrontation, it is necessary that the CST be enriched by a new interweaving with human and social sciences. This intertwinement requires a common interface. Perhaps the ‘relational matrix’ shared by theology and the social sciences can be the best conceptual frameworks for accomplishing this task .

In conclusion. What I wanted to underline in my contribution is the fact that, from *Rerum Novarum* onwards, the CST has increasingly detached itself from a dogmatic and deductive thought to enter into a *reciprocal* dialogue with human, social, and natural sciences, and in that way has become a leaven of the major social changes. The most admirable arrival point reached so far is Francis’ *Laudato Si’*.

[1] The Church is defined “as both a community of disciples, ‘The People of God’, and the social institution which structures the community” according to the dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. The world is defined, according to *Gaudium et Spes* (GS #2) as “the whole human family seen in the context of everything which envelopes it: it is the world as the theatre of human history, bearing the marks of its travail, its triumphs and its failures, the world which in the Christian vision has been created and is sustained by the love of its maker which has been freed from the slavery of sin by Christ.”

[2] Fr. Hehir refers here to two central ideas stemming from the Incarnation, i.e.: (i) the dignity of every person (and the consequent human rights and the capacity for active citizenship in society), and (ii) the work of the Kingdom of God, began by Jesus, to be continued by the Church in history, which is “the ultimate rationale for engagement.”

[3] “The second complementary idea [of GS] to that of legitimate autonomy was the explicit acknowledgement that dialogue was a learning experience for all parties; as the conciliar text states: “the Church is not unaware of how much it has profited from the history and development of mankind. It profits from the experience of past ages, from the progress of the sciences, and from the riches hidden in various cultures, through which greater light is thrown on the nature of man and new avenues to truth are opened up.” (GS # 44). Dialogue means listening and learning as well as speaking and teaching. “*Gaudium et Spes*” displays a Church which is convinced it can learn from the world and yet confident it has something important to say to the world. Confident modesty characterizes the engagement style of ‘*Gaudium et Spes*’.”

[4] Lyotard defines the *differend* as “a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments”; conflicts can arise when people are engaged in discourses that are incommensurable; because there are no rules that apply across discourses, the conflicts become *differends*; to enforce a rule in a *differend* is to enforce the rule of one discourse or the other, resulting in a wrong suffered by the party whose rule of discourse is ignored.

[5] “it is right to speak of a struggle against an economic system, if the latter is understood as a method of upholding the absolute predominance of capital, the possession of the means of production and of the land, in contrast to the free and personal nature of human work. In the struggle against such a system, what is being proposed as an alternative is not the socialist system, which in fact turns out to be State capitalism, but *rather a society of free work, of enterprise and of participation*. Such a society is not directed against the market, but demands that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the State, so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole of society are satisfied. The Church acknowledges the legitimate role of profit as an indication that a business is functioning well. (...) But profitability is not the only indicator of a firm's condition. It is possible for the financial accounts to be in order, and yet for the people — who make up the firm's most valuable asset — to be humiliated and their dignity offended. Besides being morally inadmissible, this will eventually have negative repercussions on the firm's economic efficiency. In fact, the purpose of a business firm is not simply to make a profit, but is to be found in its very existence as a community of persons who in various ways are endeavoring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society. Profit is a regulator of the life of a business, but it is not the only one; *other human and moral factors* must also be considered which, in the long term, are at least equally important for the life of a business.” (CA #35)

[6] “Other Church institutions, basic communities and small communities, movements, and forms of association are a *source of enrichment* for the Church, raised up by the Spirit for evangelizing different areas and sectors.

Frequently they bring a new evangelizing fervor and a new capacity for dialogue with the world whereby the Church is renewed. But it will prove beneficial for them not to lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish and to participate readily in the overall pastoral activity of the particular Church. This kind of integration will prevent them from concentrating only on part of the Gospel or the Church, or becoming nomads without roots." (EG #29).