Contemporary Catholic socio-economic teaching

D.G. Groody, “Catholic Social Teaching”

93, Catholic social teaching is an understanding of the church’s social mission in a dynamically changing world; it draws on theology but also philosophy, economics, sociology, and other social sciences; its goal is to provide an ethical foundation for global transformation.

93-94, Modern and contemporary social Catholic teaching includes papal documents and encyclicals that address social problems. It really starts with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, which created a radical shift in the church’s teaching by “placing the church in solidarity not with the economic and political elite of society but with the working class and the poor.” As Marx and Boff, it recognized that many are poor not because they are lazy but because of systemic and structural problems with the society: policies and institutions that limit their options and keep them in poverty.

96, The church is concerned not only with economics but with all aspects of the human being [cf. Boff], although mainstream Catholic doctrine does not go as far as liberation theology: its purpose is not to organize society but to challenge assumptions and guide the community in its search for a new social order. However, unlike in the earlier church, social transformation now is “integral to its mission of evangelization.” Catholic social teaching, however, does mention “liberation” from oppression (see notes on *Sollicitudo*).

96, The following echoes Jewish law, Boff’s analysis of earlier vs. contemporary attitudes of the church, and liberation theology: There are two main concepts in Catholic social thought: charity and justice, and the relationship between them. Charity meets the immediate needs of others. Justice “involves institutional change and transforming unjust social structures”; “personal acts of charity alone do not suffice to meet the demands of justice.”

97, The following is similar to Francis’s position: charity is what is given out of love; justice is “what each person is entitled to as a human being”; justice means “to give their due to God and neighbor.”

Benedict XVI expressed a moderate position on the church’s involvement in politics: the church must not take upon itself to bring about the most just society possible. Still the language of “liberation” is used: liberating the oppressed, eliminating the social structures of oppression.

99, Just as Francis and Franciscan theologians, Catholic social thought speaks about the three dimensions of social justice:

- **Contribution** justice, or duties of individuals towards others [cf. Francis: all must work, all must give alms];
- **Commutative** justice, or contracts [cf. Olivi, Bernardino and Franciscan economics: all contracts and business transactions must be just and contribute to the welfare of the community];
- **Distributive** justice, or society’s responsibility to the individual [cf. Jewish and Franciscan ideas: all must receive compensation for work and their share of wealth].

100, Society owes all individuals the “minimum material resources that are necessary for individuals to have a humane and dignified life”; “individuals have a right to have their basic needs met.”
Justice does not equal legality, as there could be laws that are unjust that benefit the powerful [cf. MLK] solidarity with the poor is mentioned.

101, Groody outlines several themes important to Catholic social thought, some of which coincide with the Franciscan themes, liberation theology, and even Marx: analysis of social reality [Marx, liberation]; gratuity of God [Franciscans: all comes from God]; society should be ordered toward the common good [Marx, Franciscans]; dignity of the human person [Francis, liberation]; option for the poor [liberation]; freedom as rights and responsibilities [Francis]; creating a new social order [Marx, liberation]; environment and ecological stewardship [starting with Francis and poor use]

**Contemporary Catholic socio-economic teaching: common themes reflected in three documents: Gaudium, Populorum, and Sollicitudo**

Definition: what is Catholic social teaching? The Church’s social doctrine is its “instrument.” Its aim is to interpret socio-economic realities in terms of their conformity with the Gospel and to guide Christian behavior. Thus it belongs to the field of moral theology (Sollicitudo).

A pessimistic assessment of the situation in the postcolonial world: despite unleashing tremendous economic and technological possibilities, the situation for the poor and oppressed remains dire (all three documents).

An acknowledgement that the work of the church in this area has been far from perfect (Populorum).

A theological analysis of the problem: the tensions are partly to blame on the human nature and the conflict between the limitations of humans as created beings and their feeling unlimited because they were made in the image of God (Gaudium).

An admission that humans are social beings and can no longer be treated individually (all three).

An acknowledgement that the dire situation for the poor and the oppressed, in part, is caused by current social structures that create systemic problems and “structural sin” as opposed to individual sin. Thus an acknowledgement of a need for social change (all three).

An acknowledgement that in order to meet Christian moral standards, one first needs to improve the people’s socio-economic standards. Even though economy is not all (see below), it is the foundation. Proper Christian attitudes can be expected only after one is provided with the living conditions that are appropriate for a human being, not sub-human (Gaudium, Populorum).

At the same time, economic development alone is inadequate and does not seem to solve the problems of the poor and the oppressed. It should be subjected to moral, and not just economic principles (such as gaining the highest profit possible, achieving the highest possible effectiveness, etc.). Poverty can be more than economic, for example one can be “poor” in justice (all three).
The traditional idea of distributive justice is upheld in the contemporary social teaching as well: God produced everything for everybody, and everybody should have a share in it and use it, not claim possession and ownership. The earth belongs to everyone, not only to the rich. If someone is in dire need, your surplus and even your possessions no longer belong to you (*Gaudium; Populorum*).

This means that economy should not be left up to a few people to decide on (*Gaudium*).

Possession of more and more goods (i.e., a purely economic principle) cannot be our objective; it hardens our hearts and destroys friendly relationships within the community (*Populorum*).

The position of the Church is against both liberal capitalism and totalitarian socialism (all three).

For capitalism: private property should be defended as part of personal freedom and something that provides an incentive to work (all three).

Against liberal capitalism: however, there should be some restrictions on private property, one cannot abuse this right against public interests. Private property is recognized to have social nature; in extreme cases, when the possession and handling of private property goes against public welfare, private property can be expropriated. If free trade, private property, or “unbridled” liberalism start to threaten the main moral principles, moral, and not economic principles must take precedence (all three).

More against liberal capitalism: under liberal capitalism, workers become slaves to their work, which is inhuman; the process is driven by purely economic considerations: profit and effectiveness; shared governance is lacking as the system is run by a few people (*Gaudium*).

The Church, however, speaks against totalitarianism and extreme collectivism that restrict freedom (*Populorum, Sollicitudo*).

All are obligated to work but also to be compensated, provided that compensation is not excessive and does not lead to surplus and greed (*Populorum*).

The strategies suggested for handling capital and financial policies are similar in principle to those of early Franciscans: they should benefit the community (*Gaudium*).

The Church shows great esteem for human labor and the worker, speaks of the nobility of work, as humans at work act as co-creators with God (*Gaudium, Populorum*).

*Sollicitudo* also mentions careful treatment of non-human beings, inanimate beings, and resources (anticipating Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si*).

In terms of solutions, the following is suggested: once people become aware of their interdependence on a global scale, this should bring about *solidarity*, or the people’s willingness
and enthusiasm for working together; one should foster an attitude of service (as Francis) and losing oneself to the other (Gaudium, Sollicitudo).

There are some similarities with liberation theology in terms of taking a stance “beside the poor” (“preference for the poor”) and a recommendation to replace existing political structures and institutions, i.e., the church is now concerned with politics (Sollicitudo).

In terms of methods, social change should come in the form of reforms, not revolution (all three); the strategy is to settle disputes peacefully (Gaudium); but Populorum allows for a revolution in the case of tyranny and gross violations of human rights.

_Gaudium et Spes._ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
(Pope Paul VI, Dec. 7, 1965)

Preface

1. mentions the “joys and the hopes” specifically of the poor and the afflicted as a matter of concern

Introductory Statement on the Situation of Humans in the Modern World

4. [The method:] The Church has the duty of “scrutinizing the signs of the times (Matthew 16:3) and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.”

   Mentions the new stage in history; humans “extend power in every direction” but “do not always succeed in subjecting it to their own welfare” [cf. Marx].

   The human race has never enjoyed “such an abundance of wealth” and yet a large proportion of the people are “tormented by hunger and poverty”; it has never had such a “keen understanding of freedom” and yet there are “new forms of social and psychological slavery” present; bitter social, economic and political disputes continue, etc.

8. Differences mount between races, social orders, wealthy and needy nations, etc. “What results is mutual distrust, enmities, conflicts and hardships.”

9. “As a result many persons are quite aggressively demanding those benefits of which with vivid awareness they judge themselves to be deprived either through injustice or unequal distribution. Nations on the road to progress, like those recently made independent, desire to participate in the goods of modern civilization, not only in the political field but also economically, and to play their part freely on the world scene. Still they continually fall behind while very often their economic and other dependence on wealthier nations advances more rapidly.”

   The following underprivileged groups are mentioned: the poor, women, workers, farmers; the benefits of economy and culture “need to be extended to everyone.”

   “The modern world shows itself at once powerful and weak”; “man is becoming aware that it is his responsibility to guide aright the forces which he has unleashed and which can enslave him or minister to him.”
10. [A theological analysis of the problem: humans have created nature but are also in God’s image and therefore have unlimited will:] “The truth is that the imbalances under which the modern world labors are linked with that more basic imbalance which is rooted in the heart of man. For in man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways; on the other he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life.” Hence the tensions, divisions, etc.; a warning against the material “paradise on earth” model [which is a rejection of the atheistic Marxist model].

Part I. The Church and Human Calling

Chapter 2. The Community of Humankind

25. [An acknowledgement of the role of social structures or “structural sin”:] “But if by this social life the human person is greatly aided in responding to his destiny, even in its religious dimensions, it cannot be denied that men are often diverted from doing good and spurred toward evil by the social circumstances in which they live and are immersed from their birth.”

26. [Just as Marx, acknowledges a need for social change and takes into consideration social structures:] “This social order requires constant improvement. It must be founded on truth, built on justice and animated by love; in freedom it should grow every day toward a more humane balance. An improvement in attitudes and abundant changes in society will have to take place if these objectives are to be gained.”

31. [An acknowledgement that in order to meet moral standards one first needs to improve socio-economic standards:] “Now a man can scarcely arrive at the needed sense of responsibility, unless his living conditions allow him to become conscious of his dignity, and to rise to his destiny by spending himself for God and for others. But human freedom is often crippled when a man encounters extreme poverty just as it withers when he indulges in too many of life’s comforts and imprisons himself in a kind of splendid isolation. Freedom acquires new strength, by contrast, when a man consents to the unavoidable requirements of social life, takes on the manifold demands of human partnership, and commits himself to the service of the human community.”

Part II. Some Problems of Special Urgency

Chapter 3. Economic and Social Life

63. [Developing economy does not seem to lead to improvement for the poor and oppressed:] “Reasons for anxiety, however, are not lacking. Many people, especially in economically advanced areas, seem, as it were, to be ruled by economics, so that almost their entire personal and social life is permeated with a certain economic way of thinking. Such is true both of nations that favor a collective economy and of others. At the very time when the development of economic life could mitigate social inequalities ..., it is often made to embitter them; or, in some places, it even results in a decline of the social status of the underprivileged and in contempt for
the poor. While an immense number of people still lack the absolute necessities of life, some, even in less advanced areas, live in luxury or squander wealth. Extravagance and wretchedness exist side by side. While a few enjoy very great power of choice, the majority are deprived of almost all possibility of acting on their own initiative and responsibility, and often subsist in living and working conditions unworthy of the human person.”

“Our contemporaries are coming to feel these inequalities with an ever sharper awareness, since they are thoroughly convinced that the ampler technical and economic possibilities which the world of today enjoys can and should correct this unhappy state of affairs. [But it doesn’t!] Hence, many reforms in the socioeconomic realm and a change of mentality and attitude are required of all. [Cf. Marx] For this reason the Church down through the centuries and in the light of the Gospel has worked out the principles of justice and equity demanded by right reason both for individual and social life and for international life, and she has proclaimed them especially in recent times.”

Section 1. Economic Development

64. The new methods of production are to be promoted. However, “the fundamental goal of this production is not the mere increase of products nor profit or control but rather the service of man.... [cf. Bernardino] Consequently, economic activity is to be carried on according to its own methods and laws within the limits of the moral order, so that God’s plan for mankind may be realized.”

65. [Cf. Marx:] “Economic development must remain under man's determination and must not be left to the judgment of a few men or groups possessing too much economic power or of the political community alone or of certain more powerful nations. It is necessary, on the contrary, that at every level the largest possible number of people and, when it is a question of international relations, all nations have an active share in directing that development.”

[The position of Vatican II is against both liberal capitalism and totalitarian socialism:] “Growth is not to be left solely to a kind of mechanical course of the economic activity of individuals, nor to the authority of government. For this reason, doctrines which obstruct the necessary reforms under the guise of a false liberty, and those which subordinate the basic rights of individual persons and groups to the collective organization of production must be shown to be erroneous.”

[Duty to work, as in both Francis and Marx:] “Citizens, on the other hand, should remember that it is their right and duty, which is also to be recognized by the civil authority, to contribute to the true progress of their own community according to their ability.”

66. [Similar to Marx:] “To satisfy the demands of justice and equity, strenuous efforts must be made, without disregarding the rights of persons or the natural qualities of each country, to remove as quickly as possible the immense economic inequalities...”
Section 2. Certain Principles Governing Socio-Economic Life as a Whole

67. [On work and the dignity of the worker, similar to Marx and Francis:] “Human labor which is expended in the production and exchange of goods or in the performance of economic services is superior to the other elements of economic life, for the latter have only the nature of tools.”

[The following position is similar to Francis and elevates human labor to the activity of co-creation with God, being sanctified by Jesus himself. The attitude to labor echoes both Francis and Marx.]

“This labor, whether it is engaged in independently or hired by someone else, comes immediately from the person, who as it were stamps the things of nature with his seal and subdues them to his will. By his labor a man ordinarily supports himself and his family, is joined to his fellow men and serves them, and can exercise genuine charity and be a partner in the work of bringing divine creation to perfection, [i.e., human labor is co-creation with God] Indeed, we hold that through labor offered to God man is associated with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, [!!!] Who conferred an eminent dignity on labor when at Nazareth He worked with His own hands. From this there follows for every man the duty of working faithfully [=Francis] and also the right to work. [=Marx] It is the duty of society, moreover, according to the circumstances prevailing in it, and in keeping with its role, to help the citizens to find sufficient employment. Finally, remuneration for labor is to be such that man may be furnished the means to cultivate worthily his own material, social, cultural, and spiritual life and that of his dependents....” [=Francis and Marx]

[The following is similar to Marx’s position and against capitalism; social structures are to blame for the problems:] “Since economic activity for the most part implies the associated work of human beings, any way of organizing and directing it which may be detrimental to any working men and women would be wrong and inhuman. It happens too often, however, even in our days, that workers are reduced to the level of being slaves to their own work. This is by no means justified by the so-called economic laws. The entire process of productive work, therefore, must be adapted to the needs of the person and to his way of life, above all to his domestic life, especially in respect to mothers of families, always with due regard for sex and age. The opportunity, moreover, should be granted to workers to unfold their own abilities and personality through the performance of their work.” [I.e., work should not be automatic and boring.]

68. “...With attention to the functions of each—owners or employers, management or labor—and without doing harm to the necessary unity of management, the active sharing of all in the administration and profits of these enterprises in ways to be properly determined is to be promoted. Since more often, however, decisions concerning economic and social conditions, on which the future lot of the workers and of their children depends, are made not within the business itself but by institutions on a higher level, the workers themselves should have a share also in determining these conditions—in person or through freely elected delegates. Among the basic rights of the human person is to be numbered the right of freely founding unions for working people.” [I.e., the Church now weighs in on these social issues.]
[Resolution of conflicts in handled differently from Marx and more in line with Francis’s principle not to quarrel or litigate:]”

“When, however, socio-economic disputes arise, efforts must be made to come to a peaceful settlement. Although recourse must always be had first to a sincere dialogue between the parties, a strike, nevertheless, can remain even in present-day circumstances a necessary, though ultimate, aid for the defense of the workers’ own rights and the fulfillment of their just desires. As soon as possible, however, ways should be sought to resume negotiation and the discussion of reconciliation.”

69. [A model of distributive justice similar to Jewish laws, Francis, and early Franciscans:] “God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner. Whatever the forms of property may be, as adapted to the legitimate institutions of peoples, according to diverse and changeable circumstances, attention must always be paid to this universal destination of earthly goods. In using them, therefore, man should regard the external things that he legitimately possesses not only as his own but also as common [i.e., use, not ownership!] in the sense that they should be able to benefit not only him but also others. On the other hand, the right of having a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one’s family belongs to everyone. The Fathers and Doctors of the Church held this opinion, teaching that men are obliged to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods. If one is in extreme necessity, he has the right to procure for himself what he needs out of the riches of others. [i.e., the same teaching as that of Bernardino and other Franciscans] Since there are so many people prostrate with hunger in the world, this sacred council urges all, both individuals and governments, to remember the aphorism of the Fathers, “Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him, you have killed him,” and really to share and employ their earthly goods, according to the ability of each, especially by supporting individuals or peoples with the aid by which they may be able to help and develop themselves.”

70. [An attitude to capital similar to that of Olivi and Bernardino:] “Investments, for their part, must be directed toward procuring employment and sufficient income for the people both now and in the future. Whoever makes decisions concerning these investments and the planning of the economy—whether they be individuals or groups of public authorities—are bound to keep these objectives in mind and to recognize their serious obligation of watching, on the one hand, that provision be made for the necessities required for a decent life both of individuals and of the whole community and, on the other, of looking out for the future and of establishing a right balance between the needs of present-day consumption, both individual and collective, and the demands of investing for the generation to come. They should also always bear in mind the urgent needs of underdeveloped countries or regions. In monetary matters they should beware of hurting the welfare of their own country or of other countries. Care should also be taken lest the economically weak countries unjustly suffer any loss from a change in the value of money.”

71. [Some ideas echo Olivi’s and early Franciscan high evaluation of freedom; thus the position in this regard is for capitalism and against Marx:] “Private property or some ownership of external goods confers on everyone a sphere wholly necessary for the autonomy of the person and the family, and it should be regarded as an extension of human freedom. Lastly, since it adds
incentives for carrying on one's function and charge, it constitutes one of the conditions for civil liberties.”

[However, some restrictions are placed on private property, in agreement with Marx’s line of thought:] “The right of private ownership, however, is not opposed to the right inherent in various forms of public property. Goods can be transferred to the public domain only by the competent authority, according to the demands and within the limits of the common good, and with fair compensation. Furthermore, it is the right of public authority to prevent anyone from abusing his private property to the detriment of the common good.”

[This idea is similar to both Marx and early Franciscans:] “By its very nature private property has a social quality which is based on the law of the common destination of earthly goods. If this social quality is overlooked, property often becomes an occasion of passionate desires for wealth and serious disturbances, so that a pretext is given to the attackers for calling the right itself into question.”

[In extreme cases private property can be expropriated and redistributed, which is in line with Marx’s thinking:] “In many underdeveloped regions there are large or even extensive rural estates which are only slightly cultivated or lie completely idle for the sake of profit, while the majority of the people either are without land or have only very small fields, and, on the other hand, it is evidently urgent to increase the productivity of the fields. Not infrequently those who are hired to work for the landowners or who till a portion of the land as tenants receive a wage or income unworthy of a human being, lack decent housing and are exploited by middlemen. Deprived of all security, they live under such personal servitude that almost every opportunity of acting on their own initiative and responsibility is denied to them and all advancement in human culture and all sharing in social and political life is forbidden to them. According to the different cases, therefore, reforms are necessary: that income may grow, working conditions should be improved, security in employment increased, and an incentive to working on one’s own initiative given. Indeed, insufficiently cultivated estates should be distributed to those who can make these lands fruitful; in this case, the necessary things and means, especially educational aids and the right facilities for cooperative organization, must be supplied. Whenever, nevertheless, the common good requires expropriation, compensation must be reckoned in equity after all the circumstances have been weighed.”

Populorum Progressio (On the Development of Peoples; Pope Paul VI, 1967)

1. The concern is about the poor, hungry, uneducated, etc., who seek “a larger share in the benefits of civilization”

I. Complete Human Development

6. Notes that the conditions of many people are below human dignity: not enough food, poor health, no steady employment. Points out social and economic structures as the cause (i.e., structural sin).
7-9. The effects of colonialism and the widening gap between rich (with surplus) and poor nations. People live and work in conditions “unworthy of the human person.” Inequalities in possessions and in exercise of power breed social unrest.

12. Admits [just as Boff] that the work of the Church in this area was “sometimes far from perfect.”

13. Notes that the Church, which is “founded to build the kingdom of heaven on earth,” and state are distinct from one another. However, since the Church is a human institution, it must “scrutinize the signs of the times” (Gaudium et Spes 4); i.e., subscribes to the theology of “signs of the times.”

17. Points out the communal nature of humans: each person is a member of society and community; “human solidarity brings us not only benefits but also obligations.”

[All are obligated to work and to be compensated, as in St. Paul and Francis’s Rule:]
18. “Man's personal and collective fulfillment could be jeopardized if the proper scale of values were not maintained. The pursuit of life's necessities is quite legitimate; hence we are duty-bound to do the work which enables us to obtain them: "If anyone is unwilling to work, do not let him eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). But the acquisition of worldly goods can lead men to greed, to the unrelenting desire for more, to the pursuit of greater personal power.”

[Similar to Olivi and Bernardino:]
19. “Neither individuals nor nations should regard the possession of more and more goods as the ultimate objective. Every kind of progress is a two-edged sword. It is necessary if man is to grow as a human being; yet it can also enslave him, if he comes to regard it as the supreme good and cannot look beyond it. When this happens, men harden their hearts, shut out others from their minds and gather together solely for reasons of self-interest rather than out of friendship; dissension and disunity follow soon after.”

[Similar to Boff’s analysis of poverty:]
21. “What are less than human conditions? The material poverty of those who lack the bare necessities of life, and the moral poverty of those who are crushed under the weight of their own self-love; oppressive political structures resulting from the abuse of ownership or the improper exercise of power, from the exploitation of the worker or unjust transactions.”

*** [Similar to Francis and Franciscans; note: economy and community first, then God!]
21. “What are truly human conditions? The rise from poverty to the acquisition of life's necessities; the elimination of social ills; broadening the horizons of knowledge; acquiring refinement and culture. From there one can go on to acquire a growing awareness of other people's dignity, a taste for the spirit of poverty, an active interest in the common good, and a desire for peace. Then man can acknowledge the highest values and God Himself, their author and end. Finally and above all, there is faith—God's gift to men of good will—and our loving unity in Christ....”
An important general statement of position:

22. "Now if the earth truly was created to provide man with the necessities of life and the tools for his own progress, it follows that every man has the right to glean what he needs from the earth.... All other rights, whatever they may be, including the rights of property and free trade, are to be subordinated to this principle. They should in no way hinder it; in fact, they should actively facilitate its implementation. Redirecting these rights back to their original purpose must be regarded as an important and urgent social duty."

The general policy on the use of private property:

23. "He who has the goods of this world and sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:17) Everyone knows that the Fathers of the Church laid down the duty of the rich toward the poor in no uncertain terms. As St. Ambrose put it: "You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich." These words indicate that the right to private property is not absolute and unconditional."

"No one may appropriate surplus goods solely for his own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life. In short, "as the Fathers of the Church and other eminent theologians tell us, the right of private property may never be exercised to the detriment of the common good." When "private gain and basic community needs conflict with one another," it is for the public authorities "to seek a solution to these questions, with the active involvement of individual citizens and social groups."

The same policy on expropriation as Gaudium et Spes:

24. "If certain landed estates impede the general prosperity because they are extensive, unused or poorly used, or because they bring hardship to peoples or are detrimental to the interests of the country, the common good sometimes demands their expropriation."

"...income thus derived is not for man's capricious use," and the "exclusive pursuit of personal gain is prohibited."

The Section “unbridled liberalism” is a clear condemnation of liberal capitalism mentioned by Boff:

26. Speaks of “pernicious economic concepts” that “present profit as the chief spur to economic progress, free competition as the guiding norm of economics, and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right, having no limits nor concomitant social obligations. This unbridled liberalism paves the way for a particular type of tyranny, rightly condemned by Our predecessor Pius XI, for it results in the "international imperialism of money." Such improper manipulations of economic forces can never be condemned enough; let it be said once again that economics is supposed to be in the service of man."

On the nobility of work; humans as co-creators with God; work brings them together as a community:

27. “Every worker is, to some extent, a creator—be he artist, craftsman, executive, laborer or farmer.... when work is done in common—when hope, hardship, ambition and joy are shared—it
brings together and firmly unites the wills, minds and hearts of men. In its accomplishment, men find themselves to be brothers.”

28. [As Francis and Franciscans, notes that work is human only if it results from our use of free will; mentions the dignity of the worker:] “Considered from a Christian point of view, work has an even loftier connotation. It is directed to the establishment of a supernatural order here on earth.”

*** [How the change should be accomplished: the preferred method is reform, not revolution, but it seems to make an exception for gross violations of human dignity:] 31. Revolutionary uprisings might be merited “where there is manifest, longstanding tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country.”

[As for the preferred type of social structure, also warns against totalitarianism; some freedom and individual initiative should be safeguarded:] 33. Public authorities “must also see to it that private initiative and intermediary organizations are involved in this work. In this way they will avoid total collectivization and the dangers of a planned economy which might threaten human liberty and obstruct the exercise of man's basic human rights.”

[About superfluous wealth:] 49. “We must repeat that the superfluous goods of wealthier nations ought to be placed at the disposal of poorer nations. The rule, by virtue of which in times past those nearest us were to be helped in time of need, applies today to all the needy throughout the world. And the prospering peoples will be the first to benefit from this. Continuing avarice on their part will arouse the judgment of God and the wrath of the poor, with consequences no one can foresee. If prosperous nations continue to be jealous of their own advantage alone, they will jeopardize their highest values, sacrificing the pursuit of excellence to the acquisition of possessions. We might well apply to them the parable of the rich man. His fields yielded an abundant harvest and he did not know where to store it: But God said to him, ‘Fool, this very night your soul will be demanded from you...’ (Luke 12:30).”

*** [About the inadequacy of the concept of free trade and free market:] 58. “It is evident that the principle of free trade, by itself, is no longer adequate for regulating international agreements. It certainly can work when both parties are about equal economically; in such cases it stimulates progress and rewards effort. That is why industrially developed nations see an element of justice in this principle. But the case is quite different when the nations involved are far from equal. Market prices that are freely agreed upon can turn out to be most unfair. It must be avowed openly that, in this case, the fundamental tenet of liberalism (as it is called), as the norm for market dealings, is open to serious question.”

59. “The teaching set forth by Our predecessor Leo XIII in Rerum Novarum is still valid today: when two parties are in very unequal positions, their mutual consent alone does not guarantee a fair contract; the rule of free consent remains subservient to the demands of the natural law. In Rerum Novarum this principle was set down with regard to a just wage for the individual worker; but it should be applied with equal force to contracts made between nations:
trade relations can no longer be based solely on the principle of free, unchecked competition, for it very often creates an economic dictatorship. Free trade can be called just only when it conforms to the demands of social justice.”

*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (“The Social Concern of the Church”; Pope John-Paul II, 1987, the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*)

I. Introduction

1. Notes that the social concern of the Church is directed towards an “authentic development” of humans [cf. Gutierrez]; notes the “enduring relevance” of *Populorum Progressio* (PP).

III. Survey of the Contemporary World

12-14. Describes a rather pessimistic and disappointing state of affairs compared to the times of PP: not much development has been achieved; still dire poverty, widening of the gap between rich and poor areas; “manifestations of selfishness and a flaunting of wealth”; a sense of frustration and desperation.

[Ideas similar to Boff’s analysis of types of poverty:]

15. Speaks of other forms of poverty, not only deprivation of material goods, such as denial or limitation of human rights, religious freedom, participating in the political life, the right to organize and form unions. So we are witnessing not only economic, but cultural, political, and human “underdevelopment”; also mentions unemployment (18).

16. Does acknowledge that the problem is systemic: there are economic, financial and social mechanisms which “often function almost automatically” bringing wealth to some and poverty to others; 19. Mentions the changed role of international debt: instead of helping developing nations it slows them down.

21. General position: the Church’s social doctrine adopts a critical attitude towards both liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism.

IV. Authentic Human Development

28. Introduces the terms “underdevelopment” and “superdevelopment”; seems to be making an advancement on Marx: economic development understood as “mere accumulation of goods and services” is no longer adequate, because the more one possesses, the more one wants, while “deeper aspirations” are not satisfied; it is not enough for human happiness; nor are science and technology sufficient.
14

*** [Position against consumerism, for example against buying the latest models of phones just because they are latest, not because you don’t have a phone:]

“...side-by-side with the miseries of underdevelopment, themselves unacceptable, we find ourselves up against a form of superdevelopment, equally inadmissible, because like the former it is contrary to what is good and to true happiness. This super-development, which consists in an excessive availability of every kind of material goods for the benefit of certain social groups, easily makes people slaves of "possession" and of immediate gratification, with no other horizon than the multiplication or continual replacement of the things already owned with others still better. This is the so-called civilization of "consumption" or "consumerism," which involves so much "throwing-away" and "waste." An object already owned but now superseded by something better is discarded, with no thought of its possible lasting value in itself, nor of some other human being who is poorer.

Also, this creates “the injustice of the poor distribution of the goods and services originally intended for all.”

So economy is only one aspect of “development”; one needs other aspects: human rights and freedoms, possibility for creativity, upholding ethical values, etc.

34. Specifically mentions non-human beings and natural resources as part of the new picture of “development”: “…respect for the beings which constitute the natural world... The first consideration is the appropriateness of acquiring a growing awareness of the fact that one cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate - animals, plants, the natural elements - simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs. On the contrary, one must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system... The second consideration is based on the realization - which is perhaps more urgent - that natural resources are limited; some are not, as it is said, renewable. Using them as if they were inexhaustible, with absolute dominion, seriously endangers their availability not only for the present generation but above all for generations to come.”

V. A Theological Reading of Modern Problems

35. So the assessment is that development has an “essentially moral character,” and therefore obstacles to development also have moral character (moral decisions), not only economic; this is why there was not much development; “political will has been insufficient” [i.e., people just don’t want to change, even though they know what is the right thing to do].

36. Again mentions “structures of sin” that are difficult to remove, not just individuals.

37. Problems are outlined: “the all-consuming desire for profit”; “the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one’s will upon others”—“at any price”; calls money, ideology, class, technology “forms of idolatry.”

*** 38. Sees the following ways to solution of the problems: a growing awareness of interdependence of people, and therefore possibility of solidarity between people. [This is similar
to Marx’s idea of solidarity of workers; to Sartre’s idea of one being responsible for all; and of Francis’s idea of service to all, instead of exploitation:]

“On the path toward the desired conversion, toward the overcoming of the moral obstacles to development, it is already possible to point to the positive and moral value of the growing awareness of interdependence among individuals and nations. The fact that men and women in various parts of the world feel personally affected by the injustices and violations of human rights committed in distant countries, countries which perhaps they will never visit, is a further sign of a reality transformed into awareness, thus acquiring a moral connotation.”

*** “When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a "virtue," is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all. This determination is based on the solid conviction that what is hindering full development is that desire for profit and that thirst for power already mentioned. These attitudes and "structures of sin" are only conquered - presupposing the help of divine grace - by a diametrically opposed attitude: a commitment to the good of one's neighbor with the readiness, in the gospel sense, to "lose oneself" for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to "serve him" instead of oppressing him for one's own advantage.”

Solidarity will allow us to see others as our neighbors and do what we can to improve the situation.

*** [The attitude of the Church is similar to liberation theology:] 39. “Positive signs in the contemporary world are the growing awareness of the solidarity of the poor among themselves, their efforts to support one another, and their public demonstrations on the social scene which, without recourse to violence, present their own needs and rights in the face of the inefficiency or corruption of the public authorities. By virtue of her own evangelical duty the Church feels called to take her stand beside the poor, to discern the justice of their requests, and to help satisfy them....”

VI. Some Particular Guidelines

*** 41. Mentions the Church’s social doctrine as its “instrument”; outlines the position of the Church, which is not as radical as liberation theology: “The Church’s social doctrine is not a "third way" between liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism.... Its main aim is to interpret these realities, determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching on man and his vocation, a vocation which is at once earthly and transcendent; its aim is thus to guide Christian behavior. It therefore belongs to the field, not of ideology, but of theology and particularly of moral theology.”

42. But there are some similarities with liberation theology: “Here I would like to indicate one of them: the option or love of preference for the poor. This is an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole
tradition of the Church bears witness. It affects the life of each Christian inasmuch as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our social responsibilities and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning the ownership and use of goods.”

“Today, furthermore, given the worldwide dimension which the social question has assumed, this love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future. It is impossible not to take account of the existence of these realities. To ignore them would mean becoming like the "rich man" who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate (cf. Luke 16:19-31).

Our daily life as well as our decisions in the political and economic fields must be marked by these realities.”

*** [The following sounds both like Bernardino and like Marx, as well as Boff’s idea of poverty as being deprived of rights:]

“It is necessary to state once more the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine: the goods of this world are originally meant for all. The right to private property is valid and necessary, but it does not nullify the value of this principle. Private property, in fact, is under a "social mortgage," which means that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods. Likewise, in this concern for the poor, one must not overlook that special form of poverty which consists in being deprived of fundamental human rights....”

43. However, this document suggests reforms, not radical measures: the reforms must affect the international trade system, the world monetary and financial system, etc., to prevent discrimination against developing nations and their exploitation. An example of bad trade policy is selling products that are produced cheaply in developing countries at higher prices in developed countries. Examples of bad financial policies are excessive fluctuations of exchange rates and interest rates.

*** 44. Similar to liberation theology, however, does recommend replacing flawed political systems:

“Other nations need to reform certain unjust structures, and in particular their political institutions, in order to replace corrupt, dictatorial and authoritarian forms of government by democratic and participatory ones. This is a process which we hope will spread and grow stronger. For the "health" of a political community... [is] expressed in the free and responsible participation of all citizens in public affairs, in the rule of law and in respect for the promotion of human rights....”

VII. Conclusion

46. Does use the language similar to liberation theology:

“Peoples and individuals aspire to be free: their search for full development signals their desire to overcome the many obstacles preventing them from enjoying a "more human life." ...This approach makes liberation the fundamental category and the first principle of action.”
From now on uses the language of both development and liberation!

The final appeal:

47. “I wish to ask [all people] to be convinced of the seriousness of the present moment and of each one's individual responsibility, and to implement - by the way they live as individuals and as families, by the use of their resources, by their civic activity, by contributing to economic and political decisions and by personal commitment to national and international undertakings - the measures inspired by solidarity and love of preference for the poor. This is what is demanded by the present moment and above all by the very dignity of the human person....”