

Democracy, society and truth: an exploration of Catholic social teaching

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Abstract

This article maintains that modern Catholic social teaching took shape by positioning itself between revolutionary ideologies that sought to destroy the church and reactionary forces that sought to instrumentalise it. Among the factors that contributed to this development were the emergence of a theological and socio-political conception of the laity, reflection on the question of how humans participate in Christ's rule, the development of a consociational vision of sovereignty in distinction from top-down or monistic views, the importance of labour to a proper understanding of human dignity, and the discovery of 'society', as distinct from the market and the state. Appreciation of these factors resulted in the magisterial defence of democratic politics as a necessary condition for telling the truth about what it means to be human.

Keywords: Catholic social teaching, christology, sovereignty, Christian democracy, dignity of labour

Most accounts of the development of Catholic social teaching tend to focus on the neuralgic issues that led to justifications for religious freedom and human rights, debates about church–state relations and the distinctive conceptual developments associated with them, notably notions of 'subsidiarity', 'solidarity', 'social justice' and the 'common good'.¹ However, it is my contention that to understand the relationship between democracy and truth

¹ Russell Hittinger, 'Introduction', in John Witte and Frank Alexander (eds), *The Teachings of Modern Roman Catholicism on Law, Politics, and Human Nature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 1–38; Martin Rhonheimer, *The Common Good of Constitutional Democracy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013); Michael Schooyans, 'Democracy in the Teachings of the Popes', in *Proceedings of the Workshop on Democracy* (Vatican City: Pontificiae Academiae Scientiarum Socialium, 1996), pp. 11–40; Paul E. Sigmund, 'Catholicism and Liberal Democracy', in R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach (eds), *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy* (New York: CUP, 1994), pp. 217–41; J. Bryan Hehir, 'The Modern Catholic Church and Human Rights: The Impact of the Second Vatican Council', in John Witte, Jr. and

in Catholic social teaching we must examine a number of less obvious aspects of its formation. The first is the emergence of a theological and socio-political conception of the role of the laity in contradistinction to, on the one hand, an anticlerical and secularising *laïcité*, and on the other, a clericalism that accompanied a reactionary and authoritarian ‘throne and altar’ political theology as exemplified in the work of de Maistre, de Bonald and Action Française. Second is the role of theological anthropology and in particular the question of how humans participate in Christ’s rule. Third is the development of a consociational vision of sovereignty in distinction from top-down, monistic and transcendent conceptions of sovereignty. Fourth is the importance of labour to a proper understanding of human dignity. And lastly, there is the discovery of ‘society’, as distinct from the market and the state, at the very moment of witnessing its perversion and collapse into a mass of atomised individuals brought on by either industrialised capitalism or totalitarianism. I shall briefly examine each of these in order to develop an account of why, in the contemporary context, Catholic social teaching comes to see democratic politics as a necessary condition for telling the truth about what it means to be human and our life together as humans.

The consecration of the laity

Catholic social teaching emerged in part through the need to steer a path between the Scylla of revolutionary ideologies that would destroy the church and the Charybdis of reaction that would instrumentalise it as part of a toxic mix of autocracy and nationalism. Central to navigating this narrow path was reckoning with the role of the laity in Christian witness. As Leo XIII told his curial cardinals in 1892, the church’s temporal mission needed to centre upon ‘faith embodied in the conscience of peoples rather than restoration of medieval institutions’.²

Like all paths it had two sides. One side was marked by the question of how to reconfigure the relationship between clergy and laity; the other was marked by the question of how to renegotiate the relationship between church and state. As it turned out, the pathway by which to navigate both these relationships was the same. ‘Society’ became the point of mediation between clergy and laity and between church and state, although the emphasis on society as a core focus of concern was marked by a lexical shift. As Russell Hittinger notes: ‘After the pontificate of Leo XIII (1878–1903),

Franklin S. Alexander (eds), *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction* (New York: CUP, 2010), pp. 113–34.

² Hittinger, ‘Introduction’, p. 10.

doctrina civilis became *doctrina socialis*; for its part, *iustitia legalis* became *iustitia socialis*.³

Society came to be seen as something distinct from the market, the state and the church and was understood to be the creature of none. Rather than a division between ‘throne’ and ‘altar’ wherein the role of the laity was entirely subordinated to one of obedience to and legitimation of church and state, the laity was seen to have their own agency and charism.⁴ The vocation and offices of the laity needed to be valued as part of their contribution to the formation of the people of God and the witness of the church in the world. In turn the laity became the means through which ecclesial authority could have ‘indirect’ influence and avoid the twin problems of either the subordination of the church to political ends or the instrumentalising of the state for ecclesial ends – a set of problems that had long bedevilled Christianity, from Constantine through to the Investiture Controversy, *Unam Sanctam* (1302), and beyond.⁵ At the same time, hallowing the laity needed to be distinguishable from regimes of *laïcité* that would entirely privatise and marginalise Christian belief and practice.⁶ The task of illuminating the temporal order came to be entrusted to the laity so that not only would the church respect the ‘legitimate autonomy of the democratic order’ but also so that that order might respect the legitimate autonomy of the church.⁷ The fruit of this process can be overheard in *Lumen Gentium*, which emphasised the *consecratio mundi* and the notion of specifically Christian service in the temporal

³ Russell Hittinger, ‘The Coherence of the Four Basic Principles of Catholic Social Doctrine: An Interpretation’, in Margaret S. Archer and Pierpaolo Donati (eds), *Pursuing the Common Good: How Solidarity and Subsidiarity Can Work Together*, Proceedings of the 14th Plenary Session, 2–6 May 2008 (Vatican City: Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 2008), p. 3.

⁴ There is an argument to be made that the ‘discovery’ of the laity as a point of mediation between ‘throne’ and ‘altar’ is an extension and elaboration of a more ancient configuration of the crown and mitre as types and vicars of Christ who are co-responsible for the good ordering of society. Alongside the offices of the clergy and the king, the laity could now take their place as exemplars of Christ within the body politic.

⁵ In the modern period, concern about the subordination of the church to immanent political ends underlies papal condemnation of Action Française in 1926, the worker-priests in 1954 and Liberation Theology in 1984.

⁶ Emile Perreau-Saussine, *Catholicism and Democracy: An Essay in the History of Political Thought*, trans. Richard Rex (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 91–9, 109–27; James Chappel, *The Struggle for Europe’s Soul: Catholicism and the Salvation of Democracy, 1920–1960* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

⁷ *Centesimus Annus*, §47

sphere.⁸ Catholic Action and the subsequent emergence after 1945 of such lay movements as Communion and Liberation, St Egidio, and Focolare embody this consecration of the world via the laity.

The growing appreciation of the laity was also a response to facts on the ground. The involvement of figures such as Cardinal Manning in the 1889 London Dock Strike and of other Catholics in trade unions and popular parties across Europe were key catalysts for the thinking that went into *Rerum Novarum* (1891). Later, the experiences of both lay leaders and theologians, such as Henri de Lubac, during the Second World War became an important factor in generating deeper reflection on and involvement in democratic politics. For example, the experience of cooperation with ‘secular’ politicians as part of resistance movements or through being imprisoned together in concentration camps gave birth to a remarkable degree of cooperation between Social Democratic and Christian Democratic parties across Europe after 1945.⁹ Christian Democracy as a political movement was born out of a rejection of both revolution and reaction and came to power after 1945 in Italy, Germany and elsewhere in the ashes of Fascism and in resistance to Communism. Unlike the parties of revolution and reaction, post-war Christian Democratic parties, alongside Social Democratic parties, sought to be broad-based, drawing together the working and middle classes, Protestants and Catholics, socialists and capitalists. They refused an apocalyptic politics of fear, hate and paranoia – which Communism and Fascism thrived on – and called for a politics of the common good.¹⁰ At a regional level it was this vision of politics that lay behind the formation of the Common Market (now the EU) by the likes of Jean Monnet and support for the United Nations by the likes of Jacques Maritain.

An emphasis on the public mission of the laity, however, presented its own set of problems. First was the question of how to avoid simply swapping the absolutist claims of a monarchy for those of popular sovereignty. Second was the problem of what it meant to be a people rather than a crowd or mass. The

⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, ch. 4, ‘The Laity’. Picking up on themes first enunciated by John Paul II, Pope Francis links this temporal service explicitly to evangelisation in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*.

⁹ Chappel, *Struggle for Europe’s Soul*, ch. 5.

¹⁰ For overviews of the development of Christian Democracy as a political movement, see Michael P. Fogarty, *Christian Democracy in Western Europe, 1820–1953* (London: Routledge, 1957); Thomas A. Kselman and Joseph A. Buttigieg, *European Christian Democracy: Historical Legacies and Comparative Perspectives* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003); Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of the European Union* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007); Stathis Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Chappel, *Struggle for Europe’s Soul*.

underlying issue is how the body of Christ and the body politic are constituted as a 'catholic' or universal body in which all may participate and fulfil their respective vocations. Without reordering the whole so as to enable the full participation of all, neither the people of God, nor the *demos* is truly a people. It is instead a collectivised mass, a disaggregated crowd or a constellation of competing interest groups. While the nature and basis of the body politic and the role of the body of Christ within it was contested and negotiated over millennia, industrialisation and totalitarianism were the earthquakes that brought these questions into focus in new and frightening ways.¹¹ Again, attention to the nature of society became the means of providing answers. Society was not an amorphous multitude but made up of many parts. Understanding what it meant to be a people or *demos* rather than a mass or aggregated crowd of individuals led to distinctive conceptions of first, what it meant to be human, second, the nature of sovereignty, and third the dignity of labour. These developments fed into and helped drive a broader *ressourcement* of Roman Catholic belief and practice that entailed a turn to doctrine and the Bible.

Munus regale

Intellectual and material processes of modernisation presented a crisis to settled ways of understanding what it means to be human and how to rightly order our social, economic and political life. Modern 'realists' on the left and right, who defined politics solely in terms of the exercise of power, tended to reduce what it means to be human to material concerns alone.¹²

¹¹ If *Rerum Novarum* can be read as an initial response to the problems raised by industrialisation, the response to totalitarianism comes to fruition with Pius XII, who in the space of fourteen days in March 1937 issued encyclicals against fascism in Germany, communism in the Soviet Union and atheistic liberalism in Mexico. As Hittinger notes: 'Totalitarianism prompted Catholic thinkers to support democratic government, to call for domestic and international authorities to be bound by justiciable natural or human rights, and more generally to develop what can be called a bottom-up model of legal, political, and social thought' ('Introduction', 16). See also James Chappel, 'The Catholic Origins of Totalitarianism Theory in Interwar Europe', *Modern Intellectual History* 8/3 (2011), pp. 561–90.

¹² Charles Curran notes that for John Paul II both capitalism and Marxism share the same root problem – materialism. He states: 'Wojtyła's philosophical personalism opposes the materialism of both Marxism and capitalism. *Laborem exercens*, the first social encyclical of the Wojtyła papacy continues the same approach by showing that capitalism and Marxism are based on what the pope calls "materialistic economism", a form of materialism that gives priority to the objective rather than the subjective aspects of work': *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), p. 219.

Catholic social teaching sought other kinds of answers, ones committed to the proposition that, as *Centesimus Annus* put it, ‘there can be no genuine solution of the “social question” apart from the Gospel’.¹³ Consequently, central to the development of Catholic social teaching was the realisation that the only real basis for answering the question ‘what is a human?’ was Jesus Christ.¹⁴ Christ is the true human. Christ, and not some revolutionary ideology or bourgeois civilization, reveals to us the true nature and telos of our humanity, and our freedom and dignity are secured not through any historically contingent political or economic structure or power but through our participation in Christ as part of his body. This is good news.

John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988) is a meditation on the linkage between our participation in Christ, the constitution of the church as the People of God, and the role of the laity. It emphasises again and again how the teachings of the Second Vatican Council envisage how everyone who is part of the people of God shares in Christ’s threefold mission as Prophet, Priest, and King. The lay faithful in particular are called to be involved in ‘ordering creation to the authentic well-being of humanity’ as part of their sharing ‘in the exercise of the power with which the Risen Christ draws all things to himself and subjects them along with himself to the Father, so that God might be everything to everyone’ (cf. 1 Cor 15:28; John 12:32).¹⁵

Hittinger argues that at the heart of the development of Catholic social teaching is the recovery of a notion of the *munus regale* as a way of understanding what it means to participate in Christ. In the Latin of the encyclicals the word translated as ‘function’ is *munus*, meaning service, office, gift or vocation.¹⁶ Pius XI introduces it to contrast with contractual notions of recognising the dignity of individuals and associations. The vocations or *munera* of the laity are the means by which they participate in the offices/*munera*

¹³ *Centesimus Annus*, §5. The inter-relationship between truth and freedom and how these are grounded in the Gospel was a central theme in many of John Paul II’s encyclicals, see especially *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) and *Evangelium Vitae* (1995). Likewise, Benedict XVI’s *Deus Caritas Est*, with its emphasis on the centrality of the love of God and neighbour to authentic charitable service, can be read as a profound reaffirmation of John Paul II’s link between the Gospel and the ‘social question’ (see in particular *Deus Caritas Est*, §§33–8). This linkage was developed further in *Caritas in Veritate* (2009).

¹⁴ *Redemptor Hominis* (1979); *Dives in Misericordia* (1980).

¹⁵ *Christifidelis Laici*, §14; *Lumen Gentium*, §31 and §36.

¹⁶ Russell Hittinger, ‘Social Roles and Ruling Virtues in Catholic Social Doctrine’, *Annales Theologici* 16/2 (2002), pp. 385–408; idem, ‘Coherence of the Four Basic Principles’. On the definition of *munus* see Émile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1973), p. 150.

of Christ. The state does not devolve, delegate, concede or grant rights to persons, rather it exists to facilitate the development of persons and their respective *munera* as these take shape in multiple forms of corporate and vocational life.¹⁷ Inherent in the use of *munus* is an ontology that values a multiplicity and diversity of social forms, primarily the family, but also trade unions, professional societies, political parties, universities and the like, as the means and outworking of our participation in the *munera* of Christ. An active civil society and vibrant democratic politics as the space through which different vocations, offices and social forms are lived out in practice is thus a condition of this participation. To embody the truth about what it means to be humans the laity must have the opportunity for participation in the ordering of social, political and economic life. Attempts to subordinate this social life to the state or the market are anti-Christic attempts to pervert the faithful ordering of creation. Likewise, a failure by clergy to value the integrity and autonomy of these temporal vocations is a failure to honour what it means for the church to be the body of Christ. The danger with such an approach is that the church as a *res publica* can disappear while ‘society’ becomes merely the instrument of either the market or the state.¹⁸ To counter such an implication it is vital to understand the conception of sovereignty underlying an emphasis on the lay participation in the *munera* of Christ.

A consociational vision of sovereignty

Directly related to a conception of the participation of the laity in the rule of Christ through a vibrant associational life is a consociational vision of sovereignty. ‘Consociation’ is a term derived from the work of the seventeenth-century Protestant political thinker Johannes Althusius and literally means the art of living together.¹⁹ Largely mediated via the work of the German legal scholar Otto von Gierke, Althusius’ thought was a key point of reference in the debates that helped shape Catholic social teaching. In contrast to modern conception of sovereignty as exemplified in the work of Hobbes and Rousseau, Althusius allows for the pluralisation of political order so as to accommodate and coordinate the diversity of associational life, whether economic, familial or religious.

¹⁷ See e.g. *Divini Redemptoris*, §31, and *Pacem in Terris*, §68 and §77.

¹⁸ For a critique of Maritain’s work along these lines, see William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998).

¹⁹ Johannes Althusius, *Politica*, ed. and trans. Frederick S. Carney (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), I.1. It is probable that Althusius derived his use of the term from Cicero (*De re publica* 1.25–7), although in Cicero’s usage its meaning is restricted to the legal bond for the organised conduct of public life rather than an all-encompassing term for social relations.

In a consociational account of sovereignty, to be a political animal is not to be a citizen of a unitary, hierarchically determined political society. Nor is it to participate in a polity in which all authority is derived from a transcendent, monistic point of sovereignty. Rather, it is to be a participant in a plurality of interdependent, self-organised associations that together constitute a consociational polity. The singularity and specificity of each is constitutive of the common good of all. In such a compound commonwealth, federalism is societal and political rather than simply administrative. In contrast to constitutional federalism as a way in which to limit the governmental power exercised by a sovereign authority (as exemplified in the dominant interpretations of the US Constitution), but which leaves undisturbed the top-down, transcendent and monistic nature of that authority, consociationalism envisages a full-orbed confederalism whereby the authority of the sovereign arises from the whole or commonweal, which itself is constituted from multiple consociations.²⁰ Sovereignty then is an assemblage that emerges through and is grounded upon a process of mutual communication between consociations and their reciprocal pursuit of common goods, and in which unity of the whole is pursued as a non-instrumental good. This unity is premised on the quality of cooperation and relationship-building and is not secured through either legislative procedure, the transcendent nature of sovereign authority or a centralised monopoly of governmental power. The judgement of the sovereign does not decide the exception. Rather political judgement is about discerning and weighing up goods in common. These goods emerge through the complex weave of social relations and customary practices that constitute the body politic. Political judgement involves adjudicating what should be done in order to fulfil these goods. On a consociational account, sovereign authorities should not impose order but discover it.

In a consociational account of sovereignty, the individual is not subordinated to a collective vision of peoplehood, as is the case with nationalist, fascist, state socialist and state communist regimes. Polities characterised by one or other of these regimes may include democratic elements, but the *demos* is perceived as grounded in a supposedly pre-political species of peoplehood such as the *ethnos* or *Volk*. By beginning with the

²⁰ As Robert Latham notes: 'While commentators since the seventeenth century have read Althusius as an early formulator of ideas about popular sovereignty, they have generally overlooked how he was actually vesting sovereignty or supreme power in the webs of relations that shape the possibilities for agency across a body politic . . . rather than a collective of persons': 'Social Sovereignty', *Theory, Culture and Society* 17/4 (2000), pp. 1–18, 6.

formation of the people through multiple forms of consociation (i.e. families, trade unions, congregations and the like), collectivist, homogeneous and monistic conceptions of peoplehood and popular sovereignty are challenged. Understanding 'the people' as being made up of many parts prioritises the relationship between distinct but reciprocally related 'consociations' or forms of life. This approach is seen as the best way of generating the collective self-rule of a people. Such a consociational people are a non-natural, entirely contingent yet meaningful political community.

Jacques Maritain's influential personalist and pluralist vision of social, economic, and political life exemplifies such a consociational account.²¹ He describes the plurality of society as 'an organic heterogeneity' and envisages it as being constituted by multiple yet overlapping 'political fraternities' that are independent of the state.²² Maritain distinguishes his account of a consociationalist political society and economic life from fascist and communist ones that collapse market, state and civil society into a single entity and from collectivist and individualistic conceptions of economic relations.²³ Crucially, society constitutes a sphere of social or 'fraternal' relations that has its own integrity and telos, but which nevertheless serves the defensive function of preventing either the market or the state from establishing a monopoly of power, thereby either instrumentalising social relations for the sake of the political order or commodifying social relations for the sake of the economy. Within this sphere there can exist multiple and overlapping and, on the basis of subsidiarity, semi-autonomous forms of institutional life and association, forms that are not reducible to either a private or voluntary association.

Maritain and Catholic social teaching share a consociational vision with a number of other streams of modern Christian and Jewish political thought, as seen in the work of Abraham Kuyper, John Neville Figgis, Martin Buber and Karl Barth. Proponents of such teaching came to see that authoritarian and totalitarian forms of political order are not simply political problems but forms of idolatry that distort basic patterns of human life by subordinating

²¹ Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); idem, *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of the New Christendom*, trans. Joseph Evans (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), pp. 162–76.

²² Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, pp. 163 and 171.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 169–71, 186–95. A parallel distinction is made by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), §§ 94–6, as a way of distinguishing a Christian corporatist vision of politics from fascist ones. On the Christian account corporatist and personalist forms of civic association and economic organisation are precisely a means of preventing the subsuming of all social relations to the political order.

them to the state.²⁴ A consociational form of sovereignty allows for the freedom of association that is an expression and condition of living a human life in fellowship with others. It also allows for the freedom of worship and conscience that Catholic social teaching has come to see as necessary if a horizon of reference beyond wholly materialistic and political concerns is to be maintained, and thereby ensure the de-totalising of political and economic life.

The dignity of labour

If determining the nature of sovereignty is to look at what it means to participate in Christ's rule from the top-down, valuing the dignity of work is to view the matter from the bottom-up. Whether in the home, the factory or the office, work is the central means through which we exercise our vocations and giftedness. As Catholic social teaching rightly discerns, beyond questions about the material conditions of work is its moral status: work is constitutive of our personhood.²⁵ The moral and spiritual status of labour undergirds notions of alienation, proletarianisation, commodification and other critiques of the indignity of modern work. As the Catholic Church reiterates again and again, the principle of the priority of labour – and thence the person – over capital is a necessary postulate of any moral vision.²⁶ The encyclical *Laborem Exercens* summarises this insight as follows: 'Since work in its subjective aspect is always a personal action, an *actus personae*, it follows that the whole person, body and spirit, participates in it, whether it is manual or intellectual work.'²⁷ To make labour serve and be subject to capital is to invert the moral order by making 'man' serve 'money'. We must understand that work, of whatever kind and in whatever field, is not only toil, but also gift. Like all gifts, the fruits of human labour are a way in which the person is symbolically present to and recognises others. Work, worker and the objects and services produced are profoundly related. As part of the circulation of

²⁴ Echoing Maritain, Pius XII declared that the state is an instrument rather than an end. Its role is to facilitate the 'natural perfection of man' and that the purpose of a juridical order 'is not to dominate but to serve, to help the development and increase of society's vitality in the rich multiplicity of its ends' (Pius XII, Christmas Address, 1942).

²⁵ It should be noted that Catholic social teaching is insufficiently attentive to distinctions between 'work', 'labour' and 'action' in the generation of a common life and the realisation of personhood in relation to others. A contrast can be drawn here with the work of Hannah Arendt. See Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]).

²⁶ This is set out explicitly in John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (1981), which sees the nature and purpose of human work as the key to what it calls 'the social question'; i.e. how, in the modern period, to make life more human. For an early statement along these lines see John Ryan, *Distributive Justice* (New York: Arno Press, 1978 [1916]).

²⁷ *Laborem Exercens*, §5.24.

gifts that constitute our life together in all its dimensions, work generates our *habitus* or form of life. To make work degrading is to desecrate the personhood of the workers and demean a way of life. Conceptualised as part of how humans exercise their giftedness/*munus*, work points beyond class-based analyses that posit an inherent conflict between 'labour' and 'capital' to an understanding of work as constitutive of how we forge a common world of meaning and action. Work can never be merely economic; it is always social, political and spiritual as well. Support for the labour movement and other forms of economic democracy are a necessary corollary of upholding the dignity of labour as part of human participation in Christ's rule.²⁸

Democratic politics as a condition of telling the truth

The role of the laity in the witness of the church, a consociational vision of sovereignty, a pluriform understanding of society and upholding the dignity of labour all entail putting people before programme. If the laity are to be hallowed, if a common life is to emerge through the interaction of consociations and if the fruits of our labour and thence our forms of life are not to be subordinated to the state or the market, then we must take seriously the history, customary practices and ordinary life of people. It is this life that is the conduit for our participating in the *munus* of Christ and the means for generating the practical wisdom necessary for judgements about how to live well. Yet it is precisely this ordinary, customary and common life of the people that is, in the modern period, constantly being subordinated to various legal, bureaucratic, technocratic or market-based procedures and principles. Sadly, what passes for democracy too often reproduces the corrosion of our common life, and Catholic social teaching is increasingly critical of what are seen as inauthentic forms of democracy. In contrast to the largely technocratic, managerial and consumerist procedures for aggregating choices that take place under the mantle of democracy, participatory, relational and grassroots forms of democratic organising and association have emerged as a crucial way to protect society from its subordination to both market and state

²⁸ Christian democratic parties across Europe understood this well, if not theologically, then in practice. Instead of either complete *laissez-faire* economics or the nationalisation of industry and the formation of command economies, they advocated for the codetermination of the firm by workers and management. This could entail a variety of means of ownership ranging from shareholder to co-operative and mutual ownership. Codetermination and economic democracy was the new 'third way' between 'Manchester' and 'Moscow', allowing for both the independence of the firm and the participation of the worker within the firm's management, without involving the state as an overseer. See Chappel, *Struggle for Europe's Soul*, ch. 5; Maurice Glasman, *Unnecessary Suffering: Managing Market Utopia* (London: Verso, 1996).

and thereby preserve the conditions for living a truthful and faithful life. The Solidarity movement in Poland is but one historic example of the kind of democratic politics I am pointing to. Contemporary community organising is another. As a form of local democratic politics, community organising draws together institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, unions, residents' associations and the like into coalitions in order to work together on issues of common concern such as street safety, working for a living wage or decent housing.

At this point, as well as distinguishing 'authentic' from 'inauthentic' democracy, we must distinguish democratic politics from electoral party politics and a parliamentary system of government. Catholic social teaching is agnostic about specific constitutional forms, holding an 'accidentalist' view that Christianity is compatible with any number of political regimes. As *Pacem in Terris* puts it: 'It is impossible to determine, once and for all, what is the most suitable form of government, or how civil authorities can most effectively fulfil their respective functions, i.e., the legislative, judicial and executive functions of the State.'²⁹ However, the internal logic of Catholic social teaching commits it to a democratic body politic as distinct from a democratic system of government.³⁰ John Paul II outlines the conditions to be met by democracy if it is to be authentic:

Authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person. It requires that the necessary conditions be present for the advancement both of the individual through education and formation in true ideals, and of the 'subjectivity' of society through the creation of structures of participation and shared responsibility.³¹

A participatory democratic society, as exemplified in relational and place-based forms of political and economic association such as community organising, unions and co-operatives, is a vital means through which the 'structures of participation and shared responsibility' can be both upheld and performed.³²

²⁹ *Pacem in Terris*, §67.

³⁰ *Centesimus Annus*, §46, frames support for a democratic system of government in the following terms: 'The Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility of both electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate.'

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Broadly stated democratic/civil society serves three inter-related roles: it is protective (securing space for the development of different forms of consociation), integrative

Let me now spell out and extend the logic of Catholic social teaching to suggest why a vibrant, interpersonal democratic body politic that limits the power of market and state in shaping our common life and provides contexts for humans to exercise their *munus regale* is vital for a truthful and humble politics and a faithful penitent church. First, non-violent, participatory and grassroots democratic politics is a vital means through which to ensure that the state and market recognise that humans have ends and vocations beyond political and economic life, and that the role of the market and the state is to serve humans not vice versa. It thereby helps prevent democracy from becoming a 'thinly disguised totalitarianism'.³³

Second, a democratic body politic or civil society provides a context through which the church learns to listen to others and put people before programme. For the church, listening is the constitutive political act. Through listening and responding to the Word of God the church is assembled as a public body – the *ekklesia* – out of the world. This initiatory act of listening forms the body of Christ. In being called out, this body is then enabled to participate in God's hearing of the world, and so it can both discern the truth of the world and know itself truthfully. Listening to others through involvement in democratic politics both presumes a common life (no listening takes place in contexts of violence or social atomisation) and is an act that intends and embodies such a life. Thus listening not only constitutes the church, but is itself a primary form of faithful witness within political life as it embodies and points to the reality that in Christ all things were made and all things are reconciled, and therefore a common realm of meaning and action is now possible. Involvement in participatory democratic politics is one way of listening to the world and thereby becoming the people of God and being a faithful witness.

Third, as well as being a way of bearing witness, listening to and encountering the other in political and economic life, democratic politics is a vital way in which the church learns to tell the truth about itself as such practices foster the humility and penitence necessary to hear God and neighbour. Listening is a therapy for the self-love or pride that is the attempt to secure oneself outside of relationship with God and pursue illusions of self-sufficiency both in relation to God and neighbour. By contrast, listening inoculates the church against developing false securities because in listening one has to deal with the world as it is. In listening one must take seriously who is before one and attend to the situation rather than predetermine what to do

(enabling the integration and communication between different associations) and transformative (generating critique, resistance and new ideas and inclusions).

³³ Ibid.

in accord with some prior agenda, ideology or strategy of control. When I listen to someone I encounter them neither as a statistic nor a stereotype but as a human being, as one who bears the image of God with all the density and complexity being human entails. In sum, listening is vital to deepening one's moral conversion in relation to God and others and thus one's ability to reason rightly about what is the just and truthful judgement to be made with these people, at this time, in this place. In order to know what is true, we must first listen. In certain configurations democratic politics is one such way of listening well.

In conclusion, I hope to have made clearer how Catholic social teaching may be understood as envisaging that democratic politics is a means by which we come to truthful judgements about what it means to be a church, the proper ordering of social, political and economic relations, and our common life together in this time before Christ's return.