

World Federalism in the Catholic Social Doctrine

by Andreas Bummel and Dr. Maja Brauer

In July 2009, during the fifth year of his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI published his first social encyclical “Caritas in veritate” (Love in Truth). In the face of the global financial and economic crisis, the head of the Catholic Church argues in this document, among other things, for the creation of “a true world political authority.”¹ This demand has long been part of Catholic social teaching. “Caritas in veritate” for example explicitly² draws on the tradition of the encyclical “Populorum progressio” released in 1967 in which Paul VI put the “development of world solidarity” on centre stage and reiterated his wish to come “to the establishment of a world authority capable of taking effective action on the juridical and political planes.”³

In the following, we will take a closer look at the world order model which is included in the catholic social doctrine. In doing so, we will see that it corresponds to world federalism. On this basis, we will finally reflect about how the catholic concept relates to the establishment of a world parliament.

Subsidiarity, Federalism and Relative Sovereignty

In the Catholic social doctrine of the 20th Century, the tradition of a universal order of peace was connected with the modern doctrine of freedom. In the teachings of the Catholic Church, the ideal of a global societal order manifests itself. It is an order which is built upon the dignity of each individual and on the principles of freedom, justice and subsidiarity. As will be shown, this world federalist peace model has been continuously advocated and evolved by the Holy See since Pius XII until today.⁴

As a vision of a universal peace community, the world order model of catholic social teaching



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April 2008: Pope Benedict XVI addresses the United Nations General Assembly. In July 2009 he presented the social encyclical “Caritas in veritate”

can be traced back until the beginning of human cultural history.⁵ Already in ancient philosophy, the key idea of this vision was that the political order shall promote the welfare of all. A government based on reason and justice, located at the various levels of social coexistence, was considered to be a precondition for this. According to the principle of subsidiarity formulated by Aristotle, the reasonability of government requires that each of its functions are located at the level at which a matter can be best regulated. The scholars of stoa and Christianity who explored the concept of natural rights framed this idea universally. The model of a graded order climaxed in the 14th century in Dante Alighieri’s “De Monarchia”.⁶ In this work, Dante referred to the necessity of a supreme government of a world monarch, but at the same time proclaimed that “humankind” shall only be

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ruled by the supreme sovereign “with regard to such common things which affect all”.

In the 16th century - when the medieval idea of a world monarch was no longer viable -, the Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian Francisco de Vitoria developed the conception of the equality and sovereignty of international legal subjects.⁷ This idea of the world as a community of independent states which reached a breakthrough at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and determines the international system to this day, however, was only part of Vitoria’s design. The key idea was that of a “totus orbis” according to which humanity must be understood as a non-divisible unity and wholeness, “in a way which initially desists from dividing the people into states because the orbis stands above them and includes them all.”⁸ Vitoria did not have a confederative model in mind but rather that of a world state. He also called this community of all human beings “res publica”. Vitoria assigned this entity organizational and legislative powers to which the states then are subordinate.⁹

In close proximity to this thought, Pope Pius XII repeatedly spoke out against understanding state sovereignty as being absolutely independent and omnipotent. According to him, the state was merely entitled to have “relative sovereignty”. The Pope, for instance, was in favor of the creation of “a body set up through a joint decision and vested with supreme and unlimited power whose tasks would include to crush at the very beginning each and any threat emanating from an individual or collective attack.”¹⁰

The principle of subsidiarity was clearly anchored in papal teaching in 1931 through the social encyclical “Quadragesima anno” by Pope Pius XI.¹¹ and was reiterated with regard to the global order 1963 in the encyclical “Pacem in terris” by Pope John XXIII:

“The same principle of subsidiarity which governs the relations between public authorities and individuals, families and intermediate societies in a single State must also apply to the relations between the public authority of the world community and the public authorities of each political community.”¹²

He goes on to point out, however, that it is not the duty of the universal authority “to limit the

sphere of action of the public authority of individual States”. Rather it is supposed to create conditions under which public authorities and citizens “can carry out their tasks, fulfill their duties and claim their rights with greater security”.

The importance of the federalist principle was stressed by his predecessor Pius XII on 6 April 1951 in an address to a delegation of the World Federalist Movement¹³ which was established in 1947 and held its IVth World Congress in Rome:

“Your movement, honorable gentlemen, has set itself the goal to create an effective political organization of the world. Nothing is more in accordance with the traditional teachings of the Church, nothing is more in concurrence with its proclamation on just and unjust war, particularly under today’s circumstances. ... You are of the opinion that the political world organization needs to take a federal shape in order to be effective. If you mean by this that it needs to be released from mechanical leveling down then you thereby are as well in accordance with the principles of social and political life as they are established and advocated by the Church.”¹⁴

Pius XII thus emphasized in his address that a global order shall not come along with global uniformity.

Human Dignity, Common Welfare and World State Authority

The social encyclical “Pacem in terris” by John XXIII goes beyond the principle of subsidiarity and includes a comprehensive and systematic substantiation of a federal world order. For the first time in the history of the Catholic Church, the writing does not only address all Christians but also “all men of good will.” This is already an expression of the later decision of the Second Vatican Council to abandon the claim that catholic principles have absolute validity in the public sphere and in state affairs and to strengthen the dialogue with disbelievers and those of other faith. The writing combines theological reasoning with arguments drawn from natural law. In this way, principles shall be shown on which “all men of good will” are able to agree and which at the same time include special duties for Christians based on their faith.

According to Pope John XXIII, well-ordered human coexistence needs to be based on the human dignity of every individual and has to observe universally valid human rights and duties. Thus, for the first time, “reconciliation with human rights as principles to order societal and political life” prevailed.¹⁵

In the tradition of his predecessor, John XXIII then justifies state authority from the need that it asserts these basic rights and the common good. In core aspects, this definition of state authority is in accordance with modern doctrine of freedom. According to this doctrine, the state fulfills a double task. On the one hand, the state order secures an inviolable sphere of freedom of every human being and, on the other hand, it guarantees that the use of freedom by every individual is balanced with one another according to general principles. From this argumentation, it is now possible, as Johann B. Sartorius has shown in 1837¹⁶, to derive the universal and timelessly valid requirement that the coexistence of all human beings anywhere on Earth is regulated in this way. This understanding of common welfare implies that the common good of the entire humanity *per se* can only be guaranteed by a global state authority.

In connection with the deduction of a subsidiary world state from moral philosophy, Pope John XXIII points to the increased mutual dependence of states caused by the advancement of science and technology. He considered the current structures of state organization as ill-suited to promote the common welfare of all human beings. State authority, the Pope said, needs to be adequate and effective in order to secure the public good, and he concluded, in the face of the mutual global dependence of all peoples:

“Today the universal common good presents us with problems which are world-wide in their dimensions; problems, therefore, which cannot be solved except by a public authority with power, organization and means co-extensive with these problems, and with a world-wide sphere of activity. Consequently, the moral order itself demands the establishment of such general form of public authority.”¹⁷

In this sense, the Second Vatican Council expressed itself in the pastoral constitution “*Gaudium et spes*” of 7 December 1965. The Council de-

manded, in order to “completely outlaw war”, “the establishment of some universal public authority acknowledged as such by all and endowed with the power to safeguard, on the behalf of all, security, regard for justice, and respect for rights.”¹⁸ During his pontificate, Pope John Paul II generally referred to this doctrinal tradition.¹⁹

Managing Globalization through World Federalism

The encyclical “*Caritas in veritate*” by Pope Benedict XVI updates and reiterates the catholic social doctrine in the face of globalization and the global economic crisis of 2009. Pope Benedict XVI stresses that although globalization may be regarded as a socio-economic process, this is not its only dimension. Underneath, “humanity itself is becoming increasingly interconnected.” Instead of viewing the process in fatalistic terms, man should take advantage of the many opportunities and shape globalization accordingly. The “fundamental ethical criterion” is the unity of the human family, the Pope says, and “its development towards what is good”.²⁰

Driven by the new economic-commercial and financial context, state sovereignty is narrowed, the Pope argues. Public authority can only cope with the challenges of today’s world if the modalities of the execution of state authority in the world system are changed:

“The integral development of peoples and international cooperation require the establishment of a greater degree of international ordering, marked by subsidiarity, for the management of globalization.”²¹

This demand implies world state structures and an overcoming of the Westphalian concept of 1648 through a gradation of public authority up to the global level. The establishment of independent state authority at the global level again is a key concern:

“To manage the global economy; to revive economies hit by the crisis; to avoid any deterioration of the present crisis and the greater imbalances that would result; to bring about integral and timely disarmament, food security and peace; to guarantee the protection of the

environment and to regulate migration: for all this, there is urgent need of a true world political authority, as my predecessor Blessed John XXIII indicated some years ago.”²²

A reform of the United Nations Organization and of economic institutions and international finance thus is “strongly felt“, according to Benedict XVI. A global authority to manage globalization should “be regulated by law“, vested with effective power²³, seek to establish the common good, “observe consistently the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity” and be polyarchically organized.²⁴ As Pius XII before him, Benedict XVI stresses that a global super state is not what is meant. In the tradition of Pope John XXIII, he argues that a subsidiary distribution of political authority over different levels, from the local up to the global does not weaken the state; quite on the contrary, he concludes that a strengthening would ensue. This way the state could regain “many of its competences“:

“The articulation of political authority at the local, national and international levels is one of the best ways of giving direction to the process of economic globalization.”²⁵

World Authority and Democracy

The world state character of the claim for a world authority included in catholic social teaching suggests that the principle of democracy which was formulated generally for the political system should also apply to the global “res publica”. The principle of democracy was anchored by the Second Vatican Council in the pastoral constitution “Gaudium et spes“:

“It is in full conformity with human nature that there should be juridico-political structures providing all citizens in an ever better fashion and without any discrimination the practical possibility of freely and actively taking part in the establishment of the juridical foundations of the political community and in the direction of public affairs, in fixing the terms of reference of the various public bodies and in the election of political leaders.”²⁶

Democracy was of huge importance to Pope John Paul II. In particular, he openly supported the anti-communist labor union Solidarność in his home country Poland.²⁷ Michail Gorbatchev, former President of the Soviet Union, wrote in his memoirs that the transformation in Eastern Europe would not have been possible without John Paul II.²⁸ In the encyclical “Centesimus annus” of 1 May 1991, John Paul II formulated a comprehensive criticism of totalitarianism and wrote in support of democracy:

“The Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate.”²⁹

In the encyclical “Caritas in veritate“, Benedict XVI substantiates the need for a subsidiary dispersion of political authority up to the supranational level inter alia by pointing out that this “is also the way to ensure that [economic globalization] does not actually undermine the foundations of democracy”.³⁰ In fact, the Pope implies that forms of democratic participation should also be part of subsidiary dispersion:

“Once the role of public authorities has been more clearly defined, one could foresee an increase in the new forms of political participation, nationally and internationally, that have come about through the activity of organizations operating in civil society; in this way it is to be hoped that the citizens’ interest and participation in the res publica will become more deeply rooted.”³¹

The aspect mentioned at last signifies that the single citizens shall be directly related to the political world authority. The community of the human family in the sense of the catholic social doctrine is more than an accumulation of states. The solidary development of peoples, which is supposed to be a task of the political world authority, coincides, according to Benedict XVI, with “the inclusion of all individuals and peoples within the one community of the human family”.³² The establishment of peace, the Pope also explains, is more than diplomatic relations and treaties among

governments. The efforts should “be based on values rooted in the truth of human life”: That is, “*the voice of the peoples affected* must be heard and their situation must be taken into consideration, if their expectations are to be correctly interpreted.”³³

Already in his address to the delegates of the World Federalist Movement in 1951, Pope Pius XII clarified that in his opinion a political world authority needs to be based on the participation of all human beings:

*“[The future political world organization] will only exercise effective authority to the degree in which it preserves and fosters the independent existence of a healthy human community whose members jointly participate in advancing the welfare of the whole of humanity.”*³⁴

It therefore can be concluded from the catholic social doctrine that the political world authority which it demands is understood in a way that it enables citizens to participate democratically.

Separation of Powers and World Parliament

In the political movement of world federalism which had a golden age in the years succeeding the Second World War³⁵ the democratic character of any global authority is a firm principle. Pragmatic models as well as maximalist visions of a world government likewise all included parliamentary components.³⁶ At a congress 1953 in Copenhagen, for instance, proposals for a revision of the UN Charter were passed which also included the creation of a world legislative. According to the resolution, the latter should consist of two chambers:

*“One chamber, the Council of States, shall be composed of Senators which are appointed by member states. The other chamber, the Council of Peoples, shall be composed of elected Representatives whereby there shall be a correlation to the population size of the member states.”*³⁷

The catholic social doctrine does not go into such details. According to a general understanding expressed by Pope John Paul II, the Church re-

spects “the legitimate autonomy of the democratic order” and “is not entitled to express preferences for this or that institutional or constitutional solution.”³⁸ However, in addition of those principles already examined, the principle of separation of powers is also included in catholic teaching. The encyclical “*Rerum novarum*” of 15 May 1891 contains remarks by Pope Leo XIII which describe the ideal organization of society according to a separation of legislative, executive and judiciary powers.³⁹ Pope John Paul II confirmed these deliberations in “*Centessimus annus*” and underlined the principle of the rule of law:

*“Such an ordering reflects a realistic vision of man’s social nature, which calls for legislation capable of protecting the freedom of all. To that end, it is preferable that each power be balanced by other powers and by other spheres of responsibility which keep it within proper bounds. This is the principle of the »rule of law«, in which the law is sovereign, and not the arbitrary will of individuals.”*⁴⁰

The principle of subsidiarity shall guarantee, according to the encyclical “*Caritas in veritate*” of Benedict XVI, that the world political authority does not become “a dangerous universal power of a tyrannical nature.”⁴¹ The principles of democracy, rule of law and separation of powers just examined imply that the world authority shall be subject to independent, institutional democratic oversight. Not at last this would have the purpose to ensure that it actually abides to the limits of its competences. It is an inherent inference that from the view of catholic social teaching the “future political world organization” should be equipped with a world legislative.

Conclusion

It is possible to derive from catholic social doctrine the creation of a democratic world legislative which, in particular, has the task to exercise oversight over the executive world authority. In the political movement of world federalism, the gradual establishment of such a structure is regarded as a way to practically implement a world federalist transformation of the international order. The establishment of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) thereby is considered as a first

step into the direction of a world parliament.⁴² The efforts to set up such an assembly are motivated in this context by the expectation that it would “become a political catalyst for further development of the international system and of international law” and could help to achieve “a breakthrough in the efforts to reform the UN.”⁴³ After the preceding considerations, this program in our view is in full harmony with papal doctrine.

As the proponents of a world parliament point out, this “would not simply be a new institution“, but a “manifestation and vehicle of a changed consciousness and understanding of international politics.”⁴⁴ One of the symbolic accomplishments of a UNPA would be that this body, for the first time in human history, would embody a direct relation between each and every human being and the planet. In the present Westphalian system, this relationship is still disconnected by the mediation through the state. By contrast to the government representatives in today’s international governmental organizations, representatives in a world parliament would be subject to their personal conscience and not to the instructions of governments which *per se* embody national special

interests. For this reason, the representatives in a world parliament would be free to put moral and ethical aspects and the interest of humanity into the center of their considerations. This aspect of a world parliament has a deep transcendental dimension which is echoed in the following remark by Benedict XVI:

“The Christian revelation of the unity of the human race presupposes a metaphysical interpretation of the »humanum« in which relationality is an essential element.”⁴⁵

A world parliament would be the institution to incorporate the capability of every single human being to establish a direct relationship to humanity as a whole and to its home, planet Earth. •

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- Endnotes -

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20. Pope Benedict XVI, op. cit., para. 42.
21. Ibid., para. 67.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
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25. Ibid., para. 41.
26. Second Vatican Council, op. cit., para. 75.
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29. Pope John Paul II, Centesimus Annus, encyclical of 1 May 1991, para. 46.
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31. Ibid., para. 24.
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33. Ibid., para. 72, emphasis by the authors.
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