

DUTY OF DEMOCRACIES TO CARE MORE ABOUT INTERGENERATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITIES

E. Malinvaud
malinvau@ensae.fr

Introduction

Gaudium et Spes did not explicitly recognize the value of democracy as a political system but contained enough that praised this value. It spoke against absolutism and despotism, and for the rule of law, the balance of powers, the role of civil society. However, after forty years and considering now the calls of the time, we see two major domains in which teachings of the conciliar document were deficient, in which present democracies are challenged and in which the Church mission in the social order has to be fostered : the duties of present generations with respect to future generations ; the difficult building of institutions for the world human community. This diagnosis explains my title.

A first brief part will here substantiate the point just made. The two subsequent parts will deal respectively with each one of the too often neglected solidarities. This paper substantially draws from what the author learned during the last decade at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.

1. Two failings in our teaching

Gaudium et Spes mentions the duty toward "the mounting generation". It would be difficult to argue that this recommendation was much listened to. If anything, parental concern for the education and other needs of children seems to have declined in the developed world. Similarly, the modern freedom of divorce and unmarried parentage contributed to increasing the scope for immediate self-satisfaction of mature adults. Taking advantage of new liberties turned, in several respects and in a number of cases, to run counter to the needs of children, teenagers and young adults.

Moreover we now realize that *concern for future generations must extend much beyond the mounting one* : long-run transmission of moral and cultural values, as well as prudent management of natural and environmental resources impose on us to look far ahead when we behave and decide.

On international solidarity *Gaudium et Spes* deals at length with the duties of developed toward underdeveloped countries. It also argues for the universal common good and praises progress then made in the organization of the community of nations. So international solidarity is present in the document. But forty years later the assessment has to be less favourable than it was at the time, and the message then

given is no longer fully appropriate. Many signs show that *Catholic teaching ought now to go deeper into analysing the causes of international misunderstandings and conflicts.*

2. Intergenerational solidarity

A relative neglect of the future in democracies

Democratic controls on politics mainly occur by way of periodic elections. Voters tend to decide mostly on the basis of their current situation. Forecasts into the future seem to have only weak relevance : the future context is uncertain, future wishes of citizens are uncertain, programs and promises of competing politicians are even more uncertain. Not surprisingly, public expenditure tends to reflect the immediate interest of contemporaneous voters, public debts are easily accepted, as their cost will fall on a future electorate. Such behaviour constitute an offence against intergenerational solidarity, particularly now at the eve of four decades of deep aging in many regions of the world.

In this respect current opinion trends offer contradictory features. The voice of the Church about the family, the main provider of intergenerational solidarity, is less and less listened to. However, some concerns for the future find increasing public expression, motivated in particular by a perceived depletion of natural resources and deterioration of the environment, as well as by an improved awareness of the need for institutional reforms. In order to better meet these concerns the Church will have to redeploy or deepen her teaching toward new issues of public policy.

Stewardship for future generations : a value to be now promoted¹

Children have neither the self-knowledge of their desires nor the moral capabilities which would enable them to properly rank their needs. They have to be represented by their parents, who must then act as "stewards" or "tutors", these words conveying the idea of an obligation to discharge.

Similarly, people of the present generation must act in part as stewards for the future. What they do may have strong influence on what will happen in the future, perhaps even in the distant future. They must now feel this duty to the yet unborn generations and already act in view of their needs. Our people must invest in productive infrastructures, see that future teachers are being learned, devote part of their human resource to research and development, aiming at increasing knowledge on a wide front, hence at favoring future economic productivity and social justice.

Some associations and organizations of the civil society are developing a good sense of future needs. They ought to bring precious testimonies. Similarly, social sciences are enriching the conceptual and empirical bases of our knowledge. In particular an important economic literature now exists for clarifying how long term issues ought to be tackled. For instance: up to which point would deprivations in the present generations be justified by a small but permanent future benefit over many decades? The question makes particular sense now when the prospect becomes less and less

unlikely that, even in rich countries, some day in the future levels of living may be declining.

Sustainable development

Many specific examples, such as overfishing and consequences of excessive emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases generating greenhouse effects, testify that natural resources are mismanaged. Venturing to give an overall assessment of a different kind, a group of economists and ecologists found some support to the view that current consumption levels might imperish the quality of life of future generations². Such an increasingly widespread concern calls for a renewed elaboration of the doctrine of the Church about what the agenda of sustainable development should be.

This task is not an easy matter because there are so many different aspects and components in environment problems that statements of general principles cannot suffice. A *think tank* would be required to assist the Vatican and all Christians, a think tank in which scientists would confront their knowledge of the phenomena with the experience of competent members of the civil society and with the reflections of moralists. Lessons to be learned from an abundant literature would also be reviewed.

Among the many issues to be surveyed, particular attention should be placed on what may now be reasonably expected to be achieved by technological innovations³ and by substitution of man-made capital for exhaustible natural resources⁴. Often in the past the possibilities open by such innovations and substitutions turned out to have been seriously under-estimated, particularly when alarmist concerns were voiced about the danger of overpopulation or of rapid exhaustion of reserves of natural resources. But it would be now hazardous to be confident in a simple-minded extrapolation of these past successes and good fortunes.

Elaboration of a Catholic teaching about strategies of sustainable development is going to be both challenging and rewarding. Highly challenging : knowledge about future conditions is very uncertain, but important irreversibilities affect the phenomena to be faced. Failing to now reverse some trends amounts to take chances with respect to definitive losses in some invaluable ingredients of human life. Hence, the ethics of public decisions ought to be raised to the level of the challenge.

By the way, reaching this goal will also be more generally rewarding for the thinking of the Church. Indeed, as mastery of humans over their destiny is improving, it becomes more and more necessary for us humans to act in front of uncertainties and irreversibilities, which can be grasped by wise evaluations but not fully eliminated. *Nolens, volens* humans are now developing a new capability, a new culture in this respect. Catholic teaching has to keep up with it. That will not be easy, considering what is the dominant culture in Catholic elites.

Reform of social institutions and policies

Present generations have also the duty to leave to future generations adequate social institutions, as well as adequate norms for social behaviors and policies, because

institutions and norms cannot be quickly built. About the extent of social protection in particular, there is a wide gap between what is respectively provided in the affluent North and in the poor or emerging Southern societies. Moreover, in a number of Northern countries social institutions turn out to appear unsustainable in the coming decades, which will notably experience fast aging of populations. Realization of this imbalance seems to have been the main reason why, in 1991, the encyclical *Centesimus annus* warned against the dangers of an excessive Welfare State, which would "deprive society of its responsibility" (N.48). Fifteen years later this brief reference to social policy has to be reconsidered, to be more precisely founded and to be better articulated.

During the last two decades reform of the Welfare State and of other public activities entered as a major item in the political agenda of an increasing number of rich countries. Simultaneously, quite a few emerging countries grew more productive, and engaged into various forms of social policies. This might be the proper time for a new forward-looking message of the Church, stressing the concern for transmission of a better social environment to our descendants. For that topic also, putting to work a *think tank* to assist us might be wise.

3. International solidarity in the global political order⁵

The challenge

I claimed at the beginning of this paper that, on questions of international solidarity, the message issued in 1965 by *Gaudium et Spes* was no longer fully appropriate and that Catholic teaching ought to go now deeper into the causes of international misunderstandings and conflicts. Let me be more precise about the diagnosis.

Democracy matured in a world that was and remained parcelled into states : into territories, nations and domains of government. This division of the earth, and of mankind living on it, into states coexisted with the perception that the earth was larger than one's own territory and that mankind was more than one's people. With globalization the vision now emerges of one world and of one mankind organized as a democracy. Yet this vision is very premature, to say the least. It is responsible for what I perceive to be an unrealistic and inefficient approach to the problem, even to some extent in the social teaching of the Church.

Rather than describing the present situation and the tremendous obstacles barring implementation of a truly global governance, I shall claim that we should think in terms of a different strategy to serve international solidarity. For the sake of clarity, I shall put my points bluntly, without spelling all the nuances that would be justified.

Given the distance between what is the world today and what we would like it to be, I submit that the proper process should place as its first priority the establishment of a common set of values. A second priority ought to be the emergence and development of a transnational civil society which would be much deeper, much broader and less antagonistic than the one existing today. Only, as a third priority would come institutional developments and efforts to strengthen governmental international public authorities.

This order of priorities should appear consonant with the Christian spirit. Indeed, what the social teaching of the Church contains about humanistic values, in particular about the ideal of international solidarity, is perfect. But it happened to me to think also that the social teaching of the Church had no clear vision on how to develop a transnational civil society which would be suitable for the political progress of "the entire human family" and for an increasing level of justice throughout the world. It also happened to me to think that the Church was too much pressing to what I called only the third priority. For instance, I could read in the recently published *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* sentences pressing for "a strong guiding role" to be given to public institutions of the international community, or for "accelerating the consolidation of existing institutions and the creation of new entities" (N. 370-372). I would not object to evolutions in this respect, but only if they come at the proper time, when the transnational civil society will be ready to control and sustain them⁶.

Given this position of mine, I shall now consider the three priorities in the order I assigned to them.

A global system of common values

To find and declare universal social values might be the result of spiritual life, of moral discernment, of intellectual effort and/or of practical experience. The process could in principle follow from the same pattern as was successful in national democracies, where law placed actions and regulations concerning values under an elaborate regime which stimulated, urged or even forced, society to handle that concern for values in the most careful and responsible way.

But such is not the process occurring at the world level now. Actually, there is a great need to find a common basis for a global legal order. But whatever may now be the signs of its appearance, such a common basis still greatly lacks substance. The globalizing world too often falls prey to claims voiced by those who pretend to directly impose their own values.

The most important place where this occurs is in declarations of human rights. Not surprisingly we see that the so declared human rights frequently fall victims to the strategy of clothing particular convictions, opinions or interests as a human right. The strategies, followed by many, including at the UN Commission of Human Rights, now injure the authority of such rights and endanger their underlying values. Overall, we believe at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences that there is an urgent need to develop an authentic culture of values and to prevent the "culture of human rights" from evolving still more along the trends we now see.

A transnational civil society

Whereas internationality implies a possible scope of actions for states and governments, transnationality implies such a scope for civil society. But whereas, within the democratic national state, there is a permanent and deep mutual penetration between government and society, this cannot apply to the global arena. The network

of international institutions, as well as transnational units and actors, is far too selective, diversified and patchy for such a mutual penetration.

Transnationality is the global mode of civil society. Control of transnational entities may come from national law and policies, or from international law and institutions, or still from internationally harmonized national laws and policies. Overall however, transnational entities and their activities are subject to less constraint and control than that given by a national civil society. On the other hand, manifestations of transnational civil society are less manifold and frequent than those of national civil society.

The reality in which transnationality occurs depends also on the intellectual, economic, technological, ideological strengths and weaknesses of the transnational factors and on their aims. This is well exemplified by the development of the transnational economy and of non-governmental organizations concerned by it. More and more NGOs are becoming independent transnational actors. They form transnational elites which influence public opinion and the international scene. They are vaguely accepted as a replacement for the missing international democratic basis. But their impacts may also have the character of usurpations.

All in all, the transnational civil society has an extremely complex relationship to democracy. Transnational elements may affect national democracies and the international regime. But due to a lack of democratic legitimation they have difficulty in finding the right approach and the right limits.

National democracies and the international regime

Turning now to a few considerations about the political and legal institutions which should aim at implementing international solidarity, I should be clear about the spirit in which policies of these public institutions ought to be led. If I had more time, I would first here attempt to show that definite progress was achieved during the last few decades on this front, but also that very important deficiencies remain. Maintaining the distance I chose for this paper, I shall just mention what I believe to be important features in the present institutional landscape and the need for improvement that they reveal.

Today national governments share their responsibilities with international organizations, and national law shares its effects with international law. Here lies the source of many conflicts, none appearing more challenging than those between different methods of legitimation.

There is, first, a minimal and general foundation in the principles of international law, which stipulate sovereignty and equality of states, but are time and again bypassed. It is complemented by a second layer of legitimation : the values, goods and interests, for which the State and its government stand. In a third level international institutions give a functional legitimation in specific domains, for which values, goods and interests are supposed to be common for all states involved: for instance Interpol has legitimation for international investigations requested by criminal justice, the World Health Organization has legitimation for the fight against epidemics, and so on. Of

course, the contents of each one of the layers I mentioned and their respective precedences are the object of serious debates. In particular the roles of economic and financial international institutions (the World Trade Organization, IMF, the World Bank ...) are at the center of hot conflicts.

Hence, we are back to the basic difficulties of international institution building that were mentioned above. Overall, "the international community" has no democratic sovereignty. Neither did it receive from people a general mandate. In a truly global system national democracies and international institutions should complement each other. The values served by democracies should, as far as that is consistent with their international character, be respected also within the international structures. We are still a good distance from such an ideal vision.

A conclusion about international solidarity

As can be inferred from what we saw in the last part of this paper, particular attention should now be given to the consequences of the new international scene for the Social Teaching of the Church. Her earlier message about international solidarity certainly stands. But it has to find ways for closer adaptations to the complex features of the new landscape. Teaching ought to extend beyond the present voice of the Holy See in the international regime. It will require first and foremost a better knowledge of the structures, values and conducts of the transnational civil society.

Facing the new mission of contributing to the development of a rich transnational society, the pastoral activity of the Church is *de facto* on the front line, as was so eloquently argued in this Vatican Conference on March 17 by Professor Andrea Riccardi. While conveying Christian values to people around the world, priest and laymen should also observe how local values, opinions and social structures evolve where they are living. They should wonder whether such evolutions are likely to promote international understanding and solidarity. They should participate in building, within the Church, a better knowledge of the structures, values and conducts in the emerging transnational civil society.

¹The author here takes inspiration from K. Arrow, "Speaking for the children and for the future", in M.-A. Glendon, *Intergenerational Solidarity, Welfare and Human Ecology*, The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, *Acta 10*, Vatican City, 2004, p. 234-41.

²Arrow, Dasgupta, Goulder, Daily, Ehrlich, Heal, Levin, Mäler, Schneider, Starrett and Walker, "Are we consuming too much ?", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Summer 2004, pages 147 to 172.

³On this see for instance the two articles published in the Fall 1995 issue of the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* within the symposium on "Might environmental regulation promote growth ?".

⁴Importance of this question and possibility of a long-term blocking of development is studied by R. Guesnerie, "Calcul économique et développement durable", *Revue Economique*, Mai 2004.

⁵This is directly inspired by Part IV in the document "Democracy in debate : the contribution of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences", elaborated by H. Zacher and adopted by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on 3 May 2004.

⁶A particularly relevant case, among many others, would be to insure a balanced representation of the various parts of the world in the governing bodies of international organizations.