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CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMUNITY PROCESS

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CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMUNITY PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION

THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN LIFE FOR SOCIAL PROCESS

The Conscience Problem of Concerned Christians

Few thoughtful Christians deny that as Christians they should be doing something about the social problems of our time. But, they are often not sure as to the right way of going about it. When they come to grips with the meaning of their responsibilities as Christians in the world, they are struck by the complexity of a vast network of interlocking problems, and the strong differences of opinion among people of good will about how to unravel an apparently hopeless tangle of social, political, economic, and cultural affairs.

Consequently, it is not enough to say, "Follow your conscience, and try to act from your Christian commitment," for the root problem is precisely the problem of conscience decision. How should time and energy be proportioned between meeting the immediate needs of suffering persons, and the underlying need to change the conditions of social life which produce the suffering? How should social structures be changed? By whom? Through what channels of individual or organizational effort? What is to be done when "ordinary channels" are not working--and what are the "ordinary channels" anyway? A particularly nagging question for sincere believers is, "What should be the specific input here of the fact that through Baptism I share in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission to the world, and that I keep on re-affirming this when I take part in the Eucharist?"

Goal and Plan of This Study

The goal of this study is not to give a handy formula for answering all these questions. There is no such formula. The conscience decision process involves a series of reflective human acts--analysis of the actual situation, evaluation of that situation in the light of Christian social values, careful weighing of alternative courses of action to remedy what is judged out of line, and finally, a firm decision to act in accord with what has been thought through in the light of the accepted normative religious values.

Different people in different circumstances are going to work through this series in a variety of ways and, conceivably, emerge with a number of authentically Christian actions, quite dissimilar in style and approach. As they do so, it is important that they search their grounds of motivation with as much honesty as is humanly possible and be wary of self-deception. While it is true not all are suited for direct social change action, it is also true that some will rationalize themselves out of involvement because, as they say, the problems are so complex one cannot reasonably take sides. Or, there will be other reasons. On the other hand, some who feel a special messianic charism for direct reforming, may well, in the long run be better suited for long-range, indirect, rather than front line activity. In the present study, not all these possible options can be explored. Rather, focus will be on the religious and human value base of one of them, which today is considered of prime importance in community process--the development of citizen participation in community organization as it pertains to the struggle for greater justice in the world.

In line with this intent, the plan of the work falls into three main parts, corresponding roughly in content, though not in sequence, to the steps of the conscience decision process indicated above. Part One will look to certain key concepts in recent and contemporary Church documents. Part Two will be occupied with a brief sketch of pertinent elements in the situational backdrop of the local community. The focus of Part Three will be on CUL's activity, flowing into the local situation, motivated and directed by the norms of Christian love and justice as expressed in Catholic teaching on social problems.

PART ONE

CATHOLIC THOUGHT ON JUSTICE IN THE WORLD

Development of Catholic Thought on Social Problems

Oppression of the poor, homicidal hatred, family strife, hunger, homelessness, disease, and the ravages of crime are not new on the human scene. Down through the centuries, the message of God's concern about all these evils and what people who believed in Him should do about them, is quite clear. The true believer must struggle against suffering and injustice, or he is no friend of God, while at the same

time accepting the fact that there are some things which have to be taken with resignation--even to the point, as Christ did, of dying in apparent failure to get any positive results.

What has changed drastically in modern times is the manner and extent of the human struggle against suffering and injustice. Medical and economic technology have vastly increased the power and hence the responsibility for fighting disease, injury, and for meeting the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. The gradual acceptance of democratic concepts has greatly enlarged the avenues, and here too, the responsibilities of individual persons, regarding methods of working for greater justice in the social and civic community. A direct result of all these developments is that the point at which effort stops and resignation begins, has moved far down the line from where it once was. The implications of this move are far-reaching, particularly in the area of personal social responsibility.

The significance of this last fact has in recent years been surfacing in Church documents with increasing clarity and emphasis. While Pope Leo XIII had some strong things to say about the rights of workers to organize in unions and was sympathetic to democratic concepts, this thinking was conditioned by the social theories and practices of his time. In reaction to what he saw as extreme individualistic capitalism on the one side and extreme collectivistic Marxist socialism on the other, a major part of the thrust of his emphasis was on the complementary needs and responsibilities of capital and labor, and on the role of the State in working towards reciprocal harmonization of these complementary elements in society.¹ His approach has a strong natural law, juridical flavor, despite the implicit personalism one can read between the lines, if one is searching for it. It is lacking in a clear awareness of a sense of responsibility for historical process as such.

The Theme of Association and Participation

What is the utmost importance to bear in mind in the present context is that the right of human persons to form associations and organizations, outside of the ordinary civic political realm, in order to improve the conditions of human existence, is one of the fundamental themes of Church social documents for more than eight decades. Moreover, this basic stress is not presented as a social novelty, but as an up-dated, adaptation of the same essentially human social processes expressed in the guilds of centuries ago.²

What is more, recent clarification and stress regarding collegiality in Church government has helped to recall certain long-forgotten democratic elements in the Christian tradition itself. In the early Church, priests and bishops were chosen by the people, and there was considerable important input by the people in the management of Church affairs. Episcopal rule, in the earliest Christian tradition, was much more along the lines of democratic paternalism (in the best sense of that term) than of monarchic feudalism. As a consequence, Christians need not look on democratic principles as an alien import to which they must somehow adapt.³ In point of fact, even in the highly monarchical medieval Church, very real democratic elements exist in the chapter governments of religious and monastic groups.

Growing awareness of certain now-global realities and aspirations has done much to catalyze Catholic social thought along these lines. In Church documents of the past decade and a half, there has been more and more intensity of focus on the stark reality of widespread intolerable injustices across the world, and on the rights and duties of individual persons to act against them. Deepening concern is registered about the widening gap between have and have-not peoples and the dangerous bitterness and frustration fostered by awareness of this gap. This bitterness and frustration are all the more ironically paradoxical because the divisiveness and conflict engendered arise in good part out of technological and economic developments which highlight an ever-tightening, unifying network of earthwide material interdependencies. Involved in this picture are the suicidal implications of the nuclear arms race alongside the inequitable concentration of both economic wealth and decision making power in the hands of relatively few people.⁴

Social Theory Underlying Church Documents

The basic understanding of the human person in society underlying the analysis of injustice in the world, as found in these documents, is one which works from neither the premises of individualistic capitalism nor collectivist socialism. The role of government is neither relegated to that of reluctant policeman, nor is it elevated to that of natural controller of all facets of human life. There is significant emphasis on the need for developing a considerable spectrum of non-governmental organizational structures, as called for

by the imperatives of human personal dignity doing the most it can for itself, before invoking State aid. The fundamental theory can be described as one of personally responsible human solidarity. According to this view, for example, as Pope Leo XIII stressed, capital and labor are not naturally antagonistic enemies, but, out of organic complementary social need, have a mutual bond tying them to collaborative effort for common goals.⁵

Meaning and Significance of Subsidiarity

A key principle in this theory is what has come to be known as the principle of subsidiarity, by which maximum insistence is put on personal, small groups, and non-governmental activity. When, to fight injustice, or to secure necessary positive measures for human development, the individual person, small group, or non-governmental group is inadequate to the task, then organized, collective, and, in many instances, governmental effort is called for. In other words, the "subsidiary agent" closest to the individual persons should handle all it can, and when it cannot, groups should enter into the picture--smaller, specific interest groups first, presumably non-governmental. When these cannot perform satisfactorily, appeal would be made to State action, where the start would be at the local level before going on to regional or national authority.⁶

While analysis of how this principle operates can become quite complicated, what is involved here is really nothing but an elaboration of the common sense notion that the human person, with one pair of hands and one head, does the best he or she can, alone, first, and then looks for other heads and hands when the job turns out to be too big for a single person. The principle as formulated takes into account the fact that there is very little, especially in today's technological world, that can be done without organized group effort, but that all organizational effort should be guided by recognition of the basic role of individual personal responsibility, and that organizational structures should really serve the persons who make up their membership. The situation should not be reversed, so that the persons are made to serve an impersonal structure, or be directed by others in those areas where they are capable of functioning themselves, or be exploited by those with power leverage coming from greater wealth or a particular position in the organization.⁷

Implications for Education

A major corollary here is that to the extent educational forces are deficient in educating for personal social responsibility, maximum effort must be put out to inject whatever is needed into the educational life of younger people and to remedy, by continuing educational processes, whatever is lacking in adult background. Since what is involved here is a matter of human relations skills and judgments along with civic ethical values which can be developed only in lived experience, it also follows that education along these lines at all levels must include actual experience of the social process itself. The need here clearly parallels the need doctors, scientists, and factory workers have for internships, laboratory experience, and on the job training. Citizens acquire an active sense of civic responsibility by doing.

Education of this sort is no simple matter. It entails training in group procedures, social analysis, and ethical criteria for evaluating and using techniques of social rhetoric and pressure. There is the ever-present risk for existing power centers when constituents are educated in social criticism and process, that these constituents will use their education, criticize the existing state of affairs, and try to change it. It is a risk, however, which must be taken, or deny the very premises of democratic life and Christian personal dignity.

In the concrete, there are a host of details which call for attention, and which often give rise to tension and conflict. Helping people in an area or neighborhood to identify common concerns and to summon up courage to move in a direction challenging to others cannot but provoke disagreements. These in turn lead to the need for painstaking clarification, discussion, and in many instances, arbitration and compromise. How to work with the coalition concept, where groups admit divergence on some deeply felt issues, but can agree on others, or at least a centrally important matter, demands patience, tact, and the willingness to yield as well as to insist, so long as essentials are not betrayed. Moreover, the problems multiply when one moves from relatively simple matters of a limited geographical area, which might range from trash collection to playground space for children, and enters the broader field of matters such as consumer concerns and the justice or injustice of existing tax structures as they have their impact throughout a community.

Relation to American Tradition and Specific Recent Church Documents

For those who take a dim view of education for this type of activity, one can plead, on one level, that they take the time to reflect on the roots of the American tradition as they are expressed, for example, in The Declaration of Independence, with all it implies, and also in The Federalist of Hamilton, Madison and Jay.⁸

On another plane, one can appeal to certain key concepts expressed in important Church documents of recent years. Their tone and emphasis is unmistakable, as the following examples will attest. While the documents were written in the context of global problems, their application and import for a local situation is easy to see.

Pope Paul VI, in his A Call to Action, written on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of Rerum Novarum, comments as follows on "Sharing in Responsibility:"

In Mater et Magistra Pope John XXIII stressed how much the admittance to responsibility is a basic demand of man's nature, a concrete exercise of his freedom and a path to his development, and he showed how, in economic life and particularly in enterprise, this sharing in responsibilities should be ensured. Today the field is wider, and extends to the social and political sphere in which a reasonable sharing in responsibilities and in decisions must be established and strengthened. Admittedly, it is true that the choices proposed for a decision are more and more complex; the considerations that must be borne in mind are numerous and the foreseeing of the consequences involve risk, even if new sciences strive to enlighten freedom at these important moments. However, although limits are sometimes called for, these obstacles must not slow down the giving of wider participation in working out decisions, making choices and putting them into practice. In order to counterbalance increasing technocracy, modern forms of democracy must be devised, not only making it possible for each man to become informed and to express himself, but also by involving him in shared responsibility.⁹ (emphasis inserted)

Shortly after this, in the same letter, he urges, regarding action:

Let each one examine himself to see what he has done up to now, and what he ought to do. It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustices and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. It is too easy to throw back on others responsibility for injustices, if at the same time one does not realize how each one shares in it personally, and how personal conversion is needed first.¹⁰ (emphasis inserted)

In November of the same year, 1971, the Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops issued, with Pope Paul's approval, Justice in the World. In speaking of "Educating to Justice," they affirmed:

The obstacles to the progress which we wish for ourselves and for mankind are obvious. The method of education very frequently still in use today encourages narrow individualism. Part of the human family lives immersed in a mentality which exalts possessions. The school and the communications media, which are often obstructed by the established order, allow the formation only of the man desired by that order, that is to say, man in its image, not a new man, but a copy of man as he is.

But education demands a renewal of heart, a renewal based on the recognition of sin in its individual and social manifestation. It will also inculcate a truly and entirely human way of life in justice, love and simplicity. It will likewise awaken a critical sense, which will lead us to reflect on the society in which we live and on its values; it will make men ready to renounce these values when they cease to promote justice for all men. In the developing countries, the principal aim of this education for justice consists in an attempt to awaken consciences to a knowledge of the concrete situation and in a call to secure a total improvement; by these means the transformation of the world has already begun.

Since this education makes man decidedly more human, it will help them to be no longer the object of manipulation by communications media or political forces. It will instead enable them to take in hand their own destinies and bring about communities which are truly human.

Accordingly, this education is deservedly called a continuing education, for it concerns every person and every age. It is also a practical education: it comes through action, participation and vital contact with the reality of injustice.¹¹ (emphasis inserted)

The Faith Dimension in Social Process

Up to this point in the present study, emphasis has been on some of the important human elements in the quest for justice. There remains another dimension of Catholic social thought which must be examined. It is the faith dimension--what it is, how it operates, and what it demands for growth.

Human Dignity

Fundamentally, religious faith gets into the pursuit of justice because God has revealed not only a new meaning for human dignity, but a special dignity and closeness to God of those suffering from oppression. Through faith in God's revealing word, God's peculiar love for those suffering from injustice is known, and the consequence of this, as well--that those who believe in God must express their belief by denouncing injustice and working against it as He did Himself. Witness the strength of Old Testament Prophetic tradition to this, as well as Christ's denunciation of Pharisaic oppression.

To say this is not to confuse love with justice, nor to reduce justice to love, but to affirm that those who really love Christ, identify with Him and His values, must prove their love by working to free those suffering from oppression. There can, it is true, be secular humanists dedicated to justice, who have no formal acceptance of revealed religious values. The point here is that one cannot genuinely accept revealed religious values and ignore what they mean about the need for working against injustice, towards a more just human order.

Concern for Social Justice Constitutive of Christianity

The acid test of the total Christian, then, is active commitment to the cause of justice in the world.¹²

Understood in this sense, to be a Christian at all is to be a social justice Christian. Consequently, to think of the social thought of the Church as something extra, as an optional development of the Christian consciousness, is to misunderstand, radically, the very meaning of Christianity. It also follows that to neglect serious prayerful reflection about the meaning of the social thought of the Church for one's life is to run the risk, at the least, of being a very incomplete and ineffectual Christian, or, at the worst, of presenting to the world that tragic stumbling block, the scandal of the pseudo-Christian. People of this sort would definitely seem to be among those the Second Vatican Council had in mind when it commented, sadly, on the responsibility of Christians for the rise of atheism in the modern world.¹³

How Christian Love and Justice Grow

The love of Christ, then, operative in Christians, must work for justice. But how does the love of Christ grow in the Church of our time? It is here that one must gather together and weigh carefully certain fundamental ideas emphasized in several important Vatican II documents, as necessary background for understanding the organic life of the Church itself as the Body of Christ and the People of God--prescinding, for the moment, from the question of its relationship to the world in which it exists.¹⁴ To so prescind, it must be insisted, is not to imply that the Church can really be totally comprehended apart from that world and its responsibility for it, but rather to acknowledge and work with a simple fact of all human existence, individual, as well as group, that persons and groups have a special kind of interior life of their own which is the basis for their relationship with others.

Role of the Eucharist

In this interior life of the Church, the liturgy of the Lord's Supper has a special part to play. While, it is true, Christ's presence can be felt in the world apart from it, nevertheless, He is acknowledged to be present in the Eucharist in a special manner--in His Word, His ministers, His people, and in Himself, sharing His life with those who come to Him. The Eucharist is the all-important central experience of meeting with Christ, where people offer themselves and their lives to Him and receive life-energy from Him in the ritual He himself initiated. It is a unique moment of living, dynamic contact, much more than mere remembrance. From it the love that will lead to justice can draw special strength.

Eucharistic Preparation and Follow Through

However, what people bring to the Eucharist has very much to do with what they take away, for the Eucharist, as focal point, as high, powerful symbolic moment of inter-personal meeting and communion, has all the limitations as well as strengths of an encounter moment. The time span is too brief and the place, usually, is too removed from the arena of the world for a human person to achieve complete integration of communion with Christ in the action of living in society, in the Eucharistic situation alone. Human and religious psychology call for other times of prayerful reflection, study, human small group contact, discussion, debate, the give and take of advising and receiving advice--all about the meaning of Christian life in social process. In fact, one can go so far as to say that the value and power of Eucharistic offering and impact will depend, for most people, on the extent to which these other activities take place in their lives, both before and after the Eucharistic experience itself.

In other words, a special type of continuing education is urgently needed to integrate social theory and practice with a genuine Christian sense of love and justice. This means on-going, life-long education, not only in the problems of society and the organizational processes required to meet them, but also in methods for informing these processes with the love of Christ, through study, prayerful reflection, consultation, and group effort--all imbued with the strength of Eucharistic dedication.¹⁵

In this context it is important to recall Christ's injunction: "Love your enemies." What this means in relationship to working for justice out of love is not a simple matter. There are different kinds of enemies, yet they call for basically the same kind of loving. Some are of the quiet, chess playing type, who attack calmly; others charge excitedly. Some hate those they attack; others move out of anger and frustration, lust, or greed. There are mortal enemies, who would kill, and civil enemies, who would defeat another by democratic process. These latter, in certain instances, can be friendly, outside the arena, and aggressive to the point of attack only where they disagree on policy or practice with others. There are enemies a person finds, and those one makes. In the process of working for social justice, what happens often enough is that research and analysis uncovers supporters of an unjust social pattern who do not take kindly to being thought of as enemies of the oppressed at all, and who are made enemies when they are faced with the consequences of what they are doing, and asked to change.

All the above types of enemy, adversary, or opponent relationship, and still others, can be found in the day to day struggle to work for a more just society. While the difficulty of loving the different types can vary, the fundamental motivation, if it is a motivation of Christian love, remains the same, after the manner of Christ's love, for those who attacked Him, as well as for those He criticized and whose actions He condemned.

What should be borne in mind here is that just as to be a Christian means to be a social justice Christian, so to be a social justice Christian means to be a worker for justice who really loves his or her adversaries, of whatever style they may be. It also means that one should not think it unchristian to make enemies, so long as the making results from genuine unmasking of hidden injustice. If the research, analysis, and evaluation of a social situation are accurate, this type of enemy making, done out of love, turns out to be the initial step in what has long been known as the process of fraternal correction. True, the correction may never be realized, or only imperfectly, or the situation may in fact worsen. But Christian love must make this first step, and then move on as best it can to whatever else is needed.

In the continuing education process referred to above, education for the development of this type of dynamic, sustaining love in the face of evil, is an essential element. One could even argue that this type of love, patterned specifically after the love Christ expressed in His struggle against injustice, with its forerunner type found in the chastizing love of Jahwe expressed through His prophets, is a unique input to the social change process from the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Because of its peculiar healing and reconciling power, it is clearly much needed in a change process too often characterized by abrasive attack and intransigence.

PART TWO

APPROACHES TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN METRO-MILWAUKEE

Types of Problems and the Justice Issue

Social problems, in general, can be viewed as of two basic types. First, there are those dealing with the identification of unmet fundamental human needs and what might be called the

mechanics of meeting such needs as are generally agreed to exist. Here the ordinary public or private channels of welfare service and charitable enterprise are operative. Secondly, there are problems arising out of disagreement by interested parties as to the accuracy of need identification and/or the quality and adequacy of service delivered to meet recognized needs.

The second set of problems are those commonly associated with the concept of justice, since they usually come to the fore in an atmosphere of controversy about human rights violated because basic needs are not acknowledged, or, if acknowledged, are not satisfactorily met. The two types are closely connected, since the first has to do with the practice of justice in attempting to come to grips with the implications of human rights stemming from fundamental need, whereas the second type comes into existence in reaction to default in dealing with the first.

By and large, most governmental effort, welfare and otherwise, as well as most private social service activity, deals with problems of the first sort, directly or indirectly. In meeting these needs one is acting justly, for the simple reason that persons' rights are being recognized. It is right and just that the burden of financial support, through taxation or private donation, be handled equitably, that tax or gift dollars be channelled effectively to fire and police protection, road building and maintenance, required educational, recreational, and cultural facilities. Consumers have a right in justice to be protected from producer frauds; the genuinely helpless who need food, clothing, housing, and medical care, have a right in justice to receive help. When all these basic needs, and others related to them, are met with reasonable fairness and competence, it is clear enough that justice is present, even though people may not talk much about it, and it stays in the background.

However, the situation changes visibly and audibly when there is evidence, or suspicion of evidence, that responsibilities regarding any of the matters just mentioned are not being met. In some instances the legal system and the courts are invoked to set right a situation involving violation of existing laws. At other times, new laws may have to be passed, and to get this done may take petitioning and lobbying. To iron out differences, private, non-governmental agencies and groups have traditionally set up channels of grievance procedures.

In these circumstances, although controversy and tension can be and are often present, the controversy and tension are contained within recognized and familiar boundaries for dealing with disputed rights. The boat may be vibrating from strain, but it is not rocking.

When individuals, however, or groups, conclude that none of the familiar channels for correcting wrongs are working, the picture changes drastically. The techniques of confrontation emerge, in various forms, when people judge something seriously out of line with a part of the social system, and they have good reason to know, from experience, or valid calculation, that the usual measures of correction will not put things in order. While strikes and boycotts, in many instances are within the law, they are often thought of as confrontation techniques. The same can be said of marches, rallies, and protest picketing. Likewise, the organization of new advocacy groups, whether sparked by growing awareness of a narrow geographical area, facing problems peculiar to a small territory, or whether they represent the common concern of an interest group whose members may live far apart from each other. Finally, it goes without saying that all forms of civil disobedience, even when legal penalties are calmly accepted, are grouped under the confrontation heading. The boat, in these circumstances, is no longer just being shaken up. It is being rocked. Often enough, as well, those rocking it question where it is going.

Development of Variant Approaches

In the last half century and more there has developed in Metro-Milwaukee a complicated pattern of approaches to the first type of social problems mentioned above--the problems of immediate human need from want, disease, homelessness, and other forms of suffering calling out for help. Governmental services have increased enormously on all levels, local through federal. Private agencies, religious and otherwise, have multiplied to the extent that a recent survey identified 425 of them currently functioning. In recent years, the Community Relations-Social Development Commission of Milwaukee County (SDC) has come into existence, United Community Services (UCS) has been re-organized, and the initiation of a regional planning group (COMPAS) has been suggested by the Greater Milwaukee Survey.¹⁶

Over the years, Metro-Milwaukee has had its share of variant approaches to structural causes for human want. Labor-management problems have brought on strikes in a number of areas,

and recent developments in the public sectors of fire protection and education point to a yet broader use of this confrontation technique. The civil rights struggles of the sixties had their expression here in rallies, marches, and boycotts, protesting racial discrimination in the areas of housing, jobs, education, and medical care--to mention only a few issues. Milwaukee had its riot in the summer of 1967, and has also seen acts of civil disobedience, with their attendant public reaction.

New Directions--The Awakening of Middle America

More recently, growing awareness of other justice problem areas has given rise to application of the democratic principles of the rights to association, petition, and protest, in a yet wider range of contexts. The Women's Liberation movement is being felt, through various organizational channels. Neighborhood groups of white, blue-collar and middle class people are examining their situation in the light of justice norms pertinent to taxation, recreational facilities, consumer standards, transportation, and the treatment of elderly people. American Indians and people of Spanish American descent, long silent, are beginning to organize and speak out. A ferment is spreading here, quite directly parallel to the ferment noted with approval by the Synod of Bishops as taking place with especial significance in the developing, yet oppressed, areas of the world. There is a rising concern about hitherto undetected forms of oppression and injustice in Metro-Milwaukee, and organizational protest has gone beyond the small group level to the coalition stage.

Tension between city authorities, with one approach to community organization, and these other groups has at times flared up in heated confrontation. The questions of justice underlying this tension, which presently gives no indication of lessening, would seem to present some of the most serious social problem issues facing Metro-Milwaukee. An important factor pointing to the probable escalation of these problems is that many people now getting into the type of continuing experiential education for social responsibility (of the sort urged by the Synod of Bishops) are not representatives of relatively small minority groups, but segments of that vast population known as Middle America.¹⁷

PART THREE

COUNCIL ON URBAN LIFE (CUL), CHRISTIAN LIFE AND SOCIAL PROCESS

CUL's Function

The Council on Urban Life, by its statement of purpose, defines itself in the following terms:

...a social advocacy agency working primarily with citizen groups and community organizations within the greater metropolitan Milwaukee area, helping them achieve greater self-determination in the development of their communities. CUL's philosophy is based upon the principle that all citizens have a right and a responsibility to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives and total environment. Originally formed in 1965 as a vehicle for priests of the Milwaukee Archdiocese who were interested in urban problems. CUL evolved into an organization utilizing the talents of clergy and lay persons to effect social change.¹⁸

In the vocabulary of the Greater Milwaukee Survey of Social Welfare and Health Services, Inc., CUL's operations fall in the Service System category of "Social Opportunity"--"Programs for identifying, securing, exercising and preserving rights, services or benefits to which persons or groups are entitled."¹⁹ In United Community Services language, CUL provides "Social Mediation," a type of activity formerly spoken of as a part of "Community Health and Welfare Planning."²⁰

Presently, the small CUL staff receives financial support from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee (its basic sponsoring source), UCS, and several foundations, as well as some funds from its publications and contracted services. Its primary thrust is in the direction of Community Organization Consultation, with which its programs of Research, Training, and Special Projects, are closely associated.

Relation to Other Church Groups

The focus on community organization activity and development of the capacity for self-determination is what establishes CUL's peculiar identity. In so doing, it seeks expression in a specialized way of aspirations and ideals which it shares with other Archdiocesan programs such as The Campaign for Human Development and The Justice and Peace Center, as

well as the ecumenical Greater Milwaukee Conference on Religion and Urban Affairs. While in the past it would have been distinguished from Catholic Charities operations by its mediatory concentration on community organization rather than on immediate help to the suffering, serious re-thinking, as evidenced in the National Conference of Catholic Charities self-study Final Report (August, 1972) points to strong confirmatory support and appreciation of CUL-type activity from this sector as well. In this context it would be well to note the specific recommendations of the Report on "Convening the Christian Community and Other Concerned People." This recommendation reads, in part:

The role of Convening, for our purposes, is a reaching out to others to stimulate them to social awareness and to recruit them as active partners in the pursuit of the goals of the Catholic Charities Movement. This should be a clearly identified, well-planned, and definitely organized effort. One method should be the organizing of meetings and assemblies, in order to discern more clearly the roots of distress and poverty and to reach decisions which enable those convened to act. It should constitute a major thrust of Catholic Charities in the immediate future, with the National Conference giving the highest priority to assisting local agencies to carry it forward.

Today, there is a great stirring in the hearts of people to fulfill their own aspirations and to control their own destinies. They want to participate in the making of decisions that affect their own lives. We see Catholic Charities acting as a facilitator, acting as a channel for the expression of these aspirations.²¹

As a result of this approach, it would seem likely that CUL's services would be drawn to expand along collaborative lines with agencies applying these concepts, yet without confusing its special role with theirs.

Bases for CUL's origin

Why CUL should have come into existence is not difficult to understand. On the one hand, there seems little doubt that the extent of active participation in civic life has never measured up to the ideals of our Founding Fathers. There would be ample reason for setting up the CUL office, simply as an expression of awareness that love of country, its traditions, and its way of life as measured by fundamental norms of human dignity, is a love rooted in a mature sense of Christian civic responsibility, and that good Christians

should promote this sense. On the other hand, when the forthright statements of Pope Paul VI and the Synod of Bishops are read for their implications on the local scene, ample reason becomes compelling urgency.²² The realities of justice and injustice in Metro-Milwaukee are organically linked with the realities of justice and injustice in the rest of the world. To the extent that Christians with all men of good will face the problems of their immediate surroundings, they are better prepared to meet their global responsibilities as well. To the extent their human potential for mature civic participation is stunted, or atrophied, the repercussions are far-reaching, both close to home, and elsewhere.

Community Organization Consultation and Controversy

One central problem of community organization consultation, of citizenship developmental practical education, is not hard to identify. Binding up the wounds of the wounded has rarely brought on controversy. Direct service to those in need, by means of traditional charitable services, usually wins sympathy all around. But, the picture changes when one begins to ask why people are wounded and why they are in need, and then goes on to work against the causes of hurt and evil. Careful socio-economic research all too often makes the point clear enough that people are hurt and hungry because certain social structures are unjust and exert a subtle but real violent pressure on those without money or power in civic affairs. When those responsible for the oppressive structures are confronted with precisely what they are doing, and asked to change, tension and controversy readily flare up.²³ Disagreement and controversy can likewise develop among the oppressed themselves, some of whom may have become inured to the experience of injustice against them, and are reluctant to take up a struggle which they fear may only make matters worse.

CUL is aware of these painful realities of community process, and seeks, in line with the biblical, theological, and human principles discussed above, to mitigate them as much as possible.

Need and Character of Research with a Focus

Painstaking and exact research into existing social conditions is of central importance here. It is needed on grounds of both prudential logic and essential justice, which would clearly be violated by false charges of injustice. It is for this reason precisely that CUL's research arm is considered of major importance for its consultative work.

Should someone object that research by an advocacy agency is in danger of bias, some clarifications are in order. Research with a focus is quite different from research with a bias, just as it is different from "pure" research. Social advocacy research, obviously concerned with determining whether justice or injustice exists in a given social structure, would be a contradiction in terms if it approached its inquiries with preconceived prejudicial notions about the situation it is examining. On the other hand, it does proceed from definite premises about the meaning of justice and human dignity which do have an impact on the conclusions drawn from the evidence gathered. That errors can occur, no one will deny. But the risk of error is greatly reduced, and the capacity to correct mistakes greatly increased, when the research is done by those aware of their responsibilities for accurate observation and fair evaluation, especially when they operate from a non-partisan independent stance. Such is the type of research to which CUL is dedicated.

Consultation and Self-Determination

Another fundamental challenge of community organization consultation is contained in the notion of "consultation" itself. Work of this sort is far removed from the activity of an outside expert called in to diagnose a situation and provide the remedy on the basis of his expertise. The reason is that a community organization consultant directs his efforts towards assisting people to learn, through experience, the very processes of solving community problems by developing their own skills and expertise. The essential objective of community organization development is precisely to develop the group, so that it can continue to grow and function on its own. To train for self-determination and at the same time impose problem solutions from without would clearly be self-defeating. To affirm this is not to deny the risk of the organizer-consultant over-identifying with those he is trying to help. Nor is there any glossing over the danger of less than temperate rhetoric getting into the dialogue when an issue becomes sharply defined. However, relying in good part on the strong position of Church teaching seen above, CUL is convinced that there is a more serious risk for society at large if organizational education of this type is neglected. If democratic ideals and personal social responsibility are not exercised at the grass-roots level, there is the serious danger of a creeping hidden dictatorial paternalism, however it may be disguised in democratic structures, eroding the very foundations of the American way of life, opening the way for increased exploitation and oppression.

What is ultimately at stake here is a quality of life that is most human, namely, free, responsible, independent participation in the common task of building a more human world. If this remains undeveloped, unexercised, and unfulfilled, the end result is mass de-humanization.

CUL and the Faith Dimension

In the coming year more emphasis will be put on improving research operations and training activities. It goes without saying that in this type of expanded research and training, CUL, in line with its basic consultative role, has no intent of attempting proselytization or imposing a particular sectarian religious point of view. The religious values which are CUL's inspiration are of a particular character, but CUL's exploration and integration of a deeper religious dimension in its work will be carried on as it is now, with full respect for the freedom and autonomy of individual personal conscience.

Conclusion, CUL in the Context of Liberative Development

More than six years ago when Pope Paul VI affirmed that "The new name for peace is development," he also declared, "The peoples themselves have the prime responsibility to work for their own development."²⁴ What the Pope had in mind by "development" was clearly the antithesis of mere imported technology, frequently an instrument of exploitation and oppression, used for the advantage of outsiders. He was also aware that many people need educative and economic help if they are going to be able to help themselves.²⁵

Today there are many who prefer to speak in terms of "liberation" because, unfortunately, "development" has too often disguised exploitation. But, the underlying objective of a "Theology of Liberation" and the underlying objective the Pope had in mind is the same: the development of a social order in which human persons will be free from injustice and free for growth towards complete fulfilment of their humanity.²⁶

In the last analysis, it is precisely in the context of such a concept of liberative development that CUL would situate itself, with its mediatory, auxiliary role motivated by religious love and justice, dedicated to more complete human fulfilment through improved social process in Metro-Milwaukee.

FOOTNOTES

¹Pope Leo XIII, On the Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor, Encyclical Letter, Rerum Novarum, May 15, 1891, in The Church Speaks to the Modern World: The Social Teachings of Leo XIII, ed., with an introduction by Etienne Gilson, Image Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1954), 200-49.

²Op. cit., pp. 231-238 (#49-#59). See also: Pope Pius XI, On Reconstructing the Social Order, Encyclical Letter, Quadragesimo Anno, May 15, 1931, in The Church and the Reconstruction of the Modern World: The Social Encyclicals of Pius XI, ed., with an introduction by Terence P. McLaughlin, C.S.B., Image Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1957), 228-32 (#31-#40), 246-49 (#76-#87), in the same volume, On Atheistic Communism, Encyclical Letter, Divini Redemptoris, March 19, 1937, 381 (#37); Pope John XXIII, Christianity and Social Progress, Encyclical Letter, Mater et Magistra, May 15, 1961, trans. by William J. Gibbons, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1961), pp. 25-28 (#59-#67), 32-37 (#82-#103); Pope John XXIII, Peace on Earth, Encyclical Letter, Pacem in Terris, Encyclical Letter, April 11, 1963, ed. by William J. Gibbons, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1963), p. 12 (#23-#24); Pope Paul VI, On the Development of Peoples, Encyclical Letter, Populorum Progressio, March 26, 1967, trans. by Vatican Polyglot Press (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1967), pp. 21 (#28), 23 (#33), 45 (#65), 48 (#71). For materials from more recent documents, see text, below, pp. 10-12, nn. 10-12. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church Today (Gaudium et Spes), of Vatican II, could also have been cited.

³For a recent study focusing in part on democratic process in the Church, see Patrick Granfield, Ecclesial Cybernetics (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1973), esp. Chapter 8, "The Historical Development of Ecclesial Democracy," pp. 139-70, and Chapter 9, "The Theological Foundation of Ecclesial Democracy," pp. 171-210.

⁴On these points, one could note, especially The Development of Peoples, 1967, and A Call to Action, 1971, by Pope Paul VI, as well as Justice in the World, the statement of the world Synod of Bishops, 1971.

⁵On the Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor, 1891, p. 214 (#19).

⁶The principle is affirmed as "fixed and unshaken in social philosophy," by Pope Pius XI, On Reconstructing the Social Order, 1931, p. 247 (#79). Pope John XXIII quotes this statement and elaborates on it in Christianity and Social Progress, 1961, pp. 23-25 (#53-#58). The right and duty for personal social responsibility are rooted in this principle. Whereas earlier writings focused on the right, more recent documents lay heavier stress on the responsibility aspect, which assumes the right.

⁷With regard to the humanization of social structures, note especially, Pope John XXIII, Christianity and Social Progress, 1961, pp. 25-28 (#59-#67).

⁸This is not to claim that either the Declaration or The Federalist can be read as a handbook for contemporary community organizers. Some persons would, no doubt, want to interpret Madison's reflections on factionalism in Letter Number 10 of The Federalist as containing strong warnings against the process. But to do so would seem to miss his underlying premise, that in the American way of social process, as he saw it, it was to be taken for granted that people had the right to form into opposing groups, and that the crucial issue was the orderly handling of rival positions, not their extermination. For present purposes, the important fundamental reality about both the Declaration and The Federalist is that they both rest on the right of self-determination leading to organized action as a basic right of human persons.

⁹Pope Paul VI, A Call to Action, Apostolic Letter, Octagesima Adveniens, May 14, 1971, to Cardinal Maurice Roy, President of the Council of the Laity and of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, commentary by Msgr. George G. Higgins (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1971), pp. 26-27 (#47).

¹⁰Ibid., p. 28 (#48).

¹¹The Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Justice in the World (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1972), p. 46.

¹²Ibid., p. 34. The Bishops' words bear quoting: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation." Unfortunately, this "constitutive dimension" seems to have been neglected in much Catholic education, at all levels. Cardinal Dearden, of Detroit, has referred to Catholic Social thought as "one of the best kept

Church secrets of our time." A strong stand on "Adult Education and Social Problems" can be found in the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, To Teach as Jesus Did, a Pastoral Message on Catholic Education, November, 1972 (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1973), p. 17 (#60-#61): "Adult programs which deal with social problems in light of Gospel values ... have an extremely important place in the Church's educational mission. And, as in other areas of adult education, participants in such programs must be encouraged to bring their insights and experiences to planning and conducting them."

¹³Deficiency in social conscience on the part of Christians is a specific contributory factor mentioned by the Council. See The Documents of Vatican II, ed. by Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: Harder and Harder/Association Press: 1966), "The Church Today," p. 217 (#19).

¹⁴A complete explanation of these leading ideas and their roots in Catholic tradition would go beyond the scope of this study. Important Vatican II texts bearing on the material can be found in The Documents of Vatican II, constitution "On the Church," "The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness," pp. 65-72, constitution "On Divine Revelation," pp. 111-32, constitution "On the Liturgy," pp. 142-43, decree "On the Apostolate of the Laity," pp. 489-521, and the declaration "On Christian Education," pp. 637-651. The general tenor of the constitution "On the Church Today," pp. 199-308, is likewise of fundamental importance for situating these other documents in a contemporary perspective.

¹⁵The comment of Pope John XXIII on the lack of complete religious education for many today is pertinent here. See Peace on Earth, p. 52 (#153): "...it happens in many quarters and too often that there is no proportion between scientific training and religious instruction: the former continues and is extended until it reaches higher degrees, while the latter remains at elementary level." What Pope John thought about the importance of the Church's social teaching, he had already made clear in Christianity and Social Progress, p. 69 (#222): "Above all, we affirm that the social teaching proclaimed by the Catholic Church cannot be separated from her traditional teaching regarding man's life."

¹⁶See Greater Milwaukee Survey of Social Welfare and Health Services, Inc., Final Reports, Vol. VII: "Issues and Directions," Vol. VIII: "A Communitywide Planning Mechanism," prep. by Cresap, McCormick and Paget, Inc. (Milwaukee: Printed by The Milwaukee Journal, 1973), pp. 81-103.

¹⁷For an excellent study of what is surfacing in various parts of the country, see Gabriel J. Fackre, Liberation in Middle America, Pilgrim Press Book (Philadelphia: United Church Press

1971.) Speaking, in Chapter 1, of "The Blue-Greening of America," he has this to say: "Middle Americans feel that their lives are controlled by decisions made in distant Kafka-like castles. They are right. Part of the sickness of our technocratic society is the incapacity of the VLP's (Very Little Persons) to exercise any significant influence over the VIP's, who by acts of commission or omission chart and sail our social course. Humanization means, therefore, the empowerment of the citizenry and the repossession from technocratic elites and structures of the control over our future. The young, the black, and the poor are "getting it together." And the middle American is about to join them," (pp. 15-16). "Middle Americans," for him can be considered the "unyoung," the "unpoor," and the "unblack," (pp. 17-19)-- some seventy to eight million whites between the ages of thirty and sixty or so, making an income, roughly, from about \$5,000 - \$15,000 per year.

18CUL brochure.

19Greater Milwaukee Survey, Final Reports, definition of service systems, p. 14, discussion of this category, with CUL included in it, pp. 45-47. The importance assigned to this category by the Survey should not be overlooked. The recommendation for this type of work is strongly positive. One facet of it receives top priority ranking (p. 79)--the organization of a federation of minority groups, and the pooling of private funds to support these groups.

20UCS, budget classifications by categories, 1973.

21Toward a Renewed Catholic Charities Movement: A Study of the National Conference of Catholic Charities, Final Report, August 28, 1972 (Washington, D.C.: NCCC, Theil Press, 1972), pp. 33-34.

22See above, pp. 9-10, nn. 9-11.

23See Lyle E. Schaller, Community Organization: Conflict and Reconciliation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), for a good study of the origins and techniques of the community organization movement in its technical sense, as well as a frank discussion of certain conscience problems presented by some methods of its proponents. While Schaller is sympathetic to the movement, he does not try to hide the difficulties it brings in its train.

24On the Development of Peoples, pp. 60 (#87), 51 (#77).

25Ibid., pp. 34-40 (#45-#55).

²⁶Important, and for many, upsetting thinking about "liberation" style theologizing, has come out of Latin American. A good indication of how some bishops are moving can be found in Between Honesty and Hope: Documents from and about the Church in Latin America; issued at Lima by the Peruvian Bishops' Commission for Social Action, trans. by John Drury, Maryknoll Documentation Series. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Maryknoll Publications, 1970). Among other things, this book contains copies of important Medellin materials, with commentary on them (pp. 171-234). Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, trans. and ed. by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), is recognized by scholars as a significant contribution of theological reflection on the need for social structural change in an enlarging crisis situation. While not a theological work, Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. by Myra Bergman Ramos, Continuum Books (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), should be noted in this context for its impact on the concept of "liberation" in educational method, along with its attendant stress on growth in personal responsibility for social change.

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