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JOHN PAUL II'S ANXIETY CONCERNING THE GOOD OF THE WORLD.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE ENCYCLICAL SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS

In order to have a proper understanding of the meaning and signification of John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, we need to analyse it in both a wider and more immediate context. The wider context of this encyclical is constituted by the council documents, especially the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (=GS); the immediate context is that of the papal pronouncements of John XXIII and Paul VI. Among Paul VI's encyclicals our attention is drawn to his only social encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, published in 1967.¹ John Paul II also refers to this encyclical and emphasizes its importance in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, which we are examining here.

The main subject of the papal documents mentioned here, is the human being, his dignity, role and importance in today's world. In GS it is asserted that the Church wishes to serve the human being, following the example of Christ, "who entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served" (GS, §3). For this reason, the Church emphasizes, on every occasion, the great dignity of the human being, which is based on the truth that man is made in the image of God and therefore has something of the divine

¹ Cf. Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, AAS 53(1961), pp. 401-464; *Pacem in Terris*, AAS 55(1963), pp. 257-304; cf. Paul VI., Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, AAS 26th March 1967.

within himself. Thus the human being deserves great appreciation and equitable respect, as well as esteem for his human person. We read in the GS, “this council lays stress on reverence for man; everyone must consider his every neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary to living it with dignity” (§27). Bearing this in mind, the Constitution declares that “the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition (...) every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God’s intent” (GS, §29). It is clear that the Constitution extends its protection to every human being, regardless of whether he be a man or woman, regardless of the colour of his skin or the religion he professes - all this is of no importance. What is, however, important is that he is a human being and as such he has within him something of God, and by his existence represents this God on earth. It seems that the main reason, for which the Constitution wishes to protect the human being, is above all because of the relation which the human being enjoys with God. J. Kondziela rightly contends² that the essential elements of the Christian vision of man, “are the truth of man’s divine likeness, as well as man’s adoption as a son, resulting from the fact of Divine Redemption”. Thereby the dignity of the human being is so great and, what is even more important, no one may deprive the human being of this dignity, not even the human being himself.³

Starting from these not so much premises as obvious statements, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World defends man constantly, particularly when analyzing man’s relationship to economic and social life. In this section, the Constitution states that “reasons for anxiety (...) are not lacking” (GS, §63), despite the fact that man is really the creator of the economic and social domains of life, that he dominates nature more and more, that he creates and belongs to the human family which wishes to be happy; however, owing to various systems and socio-political compromises, he is, nonetheless, very restricted in his actions. And here, the Constitution takes man under its protection: it strongly emphasizes the point that earthly goods are destined for all people. It cannot be that some suffer hunger and want, whereas others have an abundance of everything and even lives of excess.

The Constitution declares that economic progress is something good and even necessary, - but “economic development must remain under man’s determi-

2 Cf. J. Kondziela, *Osoba we wspólnocie*, Katowice 1987, p. 41.

3 *Ibidem*.

nation and must not be left to the judgment of a few men or groups possessing too much economic power” (GS, §65).⁴

Analysing this problem and taking into account the premises of the encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, Bishop I. Tokarczuk⁵ concurs that the main cause of the present situation is “the disregard and trampling underfoot of human rights (...) a lack of balance between economic development and the development of ethics (...) the use of man merely as a means to attain to other purposes”. The aforementioned author sees a remedy for, and acknowledgement of, this situation in “the reinstatement of equilibrium between technology and ethics, which in practice means the restoration of the primacy of the person over things, the spirit over matter, ethics over technology. As long as this fails to happen - Bishop Tokarczuk contends - man will not be master of himself, nor of what he does: he will not only remain in a state of menace, but even one of compulsion in various domains of life”.⁶

The above statement is a clear and unambiguous turning of attention to the need for a complete change of attitude regarding man, who will only attain greatness and freedom when he ceases to be restricted in his thoughts and actions. In short, one may say, taking up the GS’s reasoning, on condition that he is able to rule and serve.

These two aspects of man’s life and activity are present throughout the text of the GS and constitute a starting point and final conclusion in almost all subsequent papal statements and official ecclesiastical documents. GS pays particular attention to these two aspects in chapter 8, where examines the problem of the economic and social life of the vast human family. Among others, the following subjects have been selected for discussion here:

1. Primarily there exists a pressing need to remove the immense economic and social differences, if the greatness and dignity of man are to be respected. There is a strong correlation between social inequality and discrimination against both individuals and against society as a whole. The organization of the individual and communal life of nations needs to undergo improvements and changes.

2. This is closely connected to human labour. GS speaks unequivocally on the subject: “human labour which is expended in the production and exchange of goods or in the performance of economic services is s u p e r i o r [my own emphasis] to the other elements of economic life, for the latter have only the nature of

4 Cf. John XXIII, encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, AAS 53 (1961) p. 450.

5 Cf. Bp I Tokarczuk, *Problematyka pastoralna w encyklice „Redemptor Hominis”*, art. Ruchu Bibl. i Lit., Kraków 1980, p. 76-88, especially p. 84 seq.

6 *Ibidem*.

tools” (GS, §67). Speaking here of labour, the Council Fathers refer to the example which in this respect was bequeathed to us by Jesus Christ, “who conferred an eminent dignity on labour when at Nazareth He worked with His own hands” (*ibidem*). Starting from this example, one may say that every human being has the right to work in a way which is suited to his capabilities, as well as to an adequate wage for the work he performs. Labour is to make easier for man the development of his talents and to offer him an opportunity for creative joy.

3. In executing his work, man should remember that he not only works for himself, but that everyone has a right to benefit from the fruits of his labour. Here again, the authors of the Constitution accept above all a theology of labour. They work on the premise that “God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner” (GS, §69).⁷ Commentators of this statement accept the universality of destiny of earthly goods and the fruits of the labour of human hands. They are therefore to serve the good of the whole human family. This statement contains yet another hidden truth: if such is the case, if we work for the benefit of all, then no one may suffer hunger; this applies both to individuals as well as to ruling elites and whole nations. In some way, we are all bound to help others to such an extent that they might live in peace and, as the Constitution says “enter upon the way of development” (*ibidem*).

4. As the Constitution maintains, behaviour in harmony with the above mentioned postulates, “can make a great contribution to the prosperity of mankind and to the peace of the world” (GS, §72). An extraordinarily important role is to be played here by Christians, as ones observing a hierarchy of values, with their eyes fixed on Christ and living according to the spirit of His eight beatitudes, they have a duty to implement the spirit of the Gospel and to build everywhere on earth the Kingdom of God.

The above comments, strongly emphasized in GS, are all meant to raise the awareness of today’s society of the greatness and dignity of man and to convince it that, in respect of man, no form of violence, totalitarianism, neo-colonialism or imperialism may be applied.⁸ The human being is constantly to be recognized within the context of a current situation, and one needs to be deeply convinced that only “in Christ and through Christ has man acquired full awareness of his dignity, of the

⁷ John XXIII widely discusses the above in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, AAS 53 (1961), p. 441.

⁸ Cf. Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (14th September 1981) §4: AAS 73 (1981).

heights to which he is raised, of the surpassing worth of his own humanity, and of the meaning of his existence”.⁹

As J. Ozdowski¹⁰ contends, there is a pressing need to bind man to Christ and His Truth, thanks to which man frees himself of all the bonds that make him a slave of various economic and social systems and do not allow him progress onto the way of mature humanity, which leads to freedom and love.

It seems that the statements of GS are to enable man and all those immersed in the morass of different economic, social and political systems, to understand that he is a divine creature and that everything he does ought to be guided by the eternal divine plan, according to which man’s purpose is his ultimate salvation.¹¹

Due to the fact that man lives in society, his life also has a social dimension. As J. Kondziela remarks, when he writes that “apart from being a transcendental being in respect of the circumstances in which he lives, man is also a historic being (...) without doubt, both these dimensions supplement each other (...) therefore the construction of the sense of life must comprise his involvement in social matters (...) man develops not only when he takes, but above all when he gives something of himself”.¹² The above statement may be taken as a commentary to GS, particularly in the domain of relations between the family, the nation and society. In this case, the Constitution provides many themes for discussion, themes which will later be taken up in ecclesiastical documents, especially by Paul VI’s encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.¹³

As I have already mentioned, this is the only social encyclical written by Paul VI. Regardless of the fact that it is a continuation of the thought of the Church in this domain, beginning with Leo XIII, through Pius XII and John XXIII, it contains many valuable remarks regarding current needs and present times. John Paul II said of the encyclical that it was ‘a kind of response’ to the Council’s appeal made in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* and noted that “the Encyclical presents itself as an application of the Council’s teaching in social matters to the specific problem of the development and the underdevelopment of peoples”.¹⁴ Hence its great and

9 Cf. Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, §11.

10 Cf. J. Ozdowski, *Zagrożenia i perspektywy postępu ekonomicznego w świetle enc. „Redemptor Hominis”*, in: *„Redemptor Hominis”, tekst i komentarz*, Kraków 1980, wyd. PTT, pp. 198 seq.

11 Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Nauczanie społeczne 1978-1981, t. 1-4*, Warszawa 1982-1984.

12 Cf. J. Kondziela, *Osoba we wspólnocie*, op. cit., pp. 65-67.

13 Encyclical dated 26.03.1967; AAS 59(1967), pp. 257-259.

14 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §6.7.

inestimable importance in the interpretation of John Paul II's thought, contained in the encyclical which interests us at present: *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

Giving a general opinion of the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, it needs to be said that its main theme is also, first and foremost, man and his existence in the present world. At the very beginning, the Pope remarks that "in God's plan, every man is born to seek self-fulfilment, for every human life is called to some task by God (§15). Further on Paul VI declares, because "each man is also a member of society; hence he belongs to the community of man. It is not just certain individuals but all men who are called to further the development of human society as a whole (§17). It follows from these statements that man as an individual should above all develop, by nurturing both his intellectual and moral development, not losing sight of the fact that he is a creature of God and that as such he cannot hope to develop fully, if he does not have regard for his relationship with God. This development of the individual lies at the very foundation of our humanity and is linked to the dignity of the human person, which was also stressed by John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*.¹⁵ The development of man must be comprehensive and must include all the domains of his life. For the sake of this development, Paul VI no less strongly emphasizes that a hierarchy of values is to be observed and acknowledged.¹⁶ One cannot overestimate the dangers inherent in acquiring worldly goods, for "the acquisition of worldly goods - says the Pope - can lead men to greed, to the unrelenting desire for more, to the pursuit of greater personal power" (§ 18). In tending towards any sort of development, man should always be at the centre of attention as well as the fact that development "to be authentic, must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man" (§14). Two phrases of this statement: "well rounded [development]" and "development of the whole man" merit a special mention. Having this in mind, Paul VI emphasizes the role and importance in human life of labour, culture, learning, the eradication of illiteracy; not only the concern for man's body, but also for his soul, i.e. for the well-rounded development of the individual and of all people.¹⁷

It is only against such a background that the need is clearly shown for the development of society, to which the individual belongs and who forms it. Here again, it becomes evident how important is the preserving of the safeguarding of

15 Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, §9; also J. Majka, *Filozofia społeczna*, Warszawa 1982, p. 233.

16 Cf. *Pacem in Terris*, §18.

17 There is here an important statement of the Pope on the subject of the need for education, contained in §35 of the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, as also of the condemning of all forms of racism, which lead to disagreement and hostility between people. Cf. §63 of the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.

a hierarchy of values, mentioned above, from which it follows that, for example, the pursuit of development in respect of prosperity cannot be the highest goal. This is stated very clearly by Paul VI: “Thus the exclusive pursuit of material possessions prevents man’s growth as a human being and stands in opposition to his true grandeur. Avarice, in individuals and in nations, is the most obvious form of stultified moral development” (§19).

In his concern for the development of nations and societies, Paul VI indicates three ways, which not only facilitate this development, but also make it fruitful and lasting. These are:

“mutual solidarity - the aid that the richer nations must give to developing nations” (§44). The idea of a global solidarity is most important, because it not only opens hearts to the needs of the poor, but causes people to get to know each other better and thanks to this solidarity an atmosphere of family warmth and mutual understanding is created.

The second duty determining appropriate development is that of “social justice - the rectification of trade relations between strong and weak nations” (§44). Here the Pope works on an assumption, to which John Paul II will frequently refer, that every human being has the right to justice, and so the manifestation of this justice, or even more, its implementation, constitutes a revelation of a full understanding of one’s humanity, the image of which is today blurred, for various reasons, not only in the case of individuals, but also of whole nations.

The third duty, according to Paul VI, is “universal charity - the effort to build a more humane world community, where all can give and receive, and where the progress of some is not bought at the expense of others” (§44).

The Pope lays great emphasis on these three duties, especially on the third one, linking the practice of charity to his great hope for the future. As is clear from the text of the whole encyclical, only charity and, as the Pope frequently stresses, supernatural love, can overcome the evil which is spreading at present throughout the world and leading to its inglorious collapse.¹⁸ Development understood in such a way can remedy the tragedies, which touch millions of people and it alone may become a blessing for mankind.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* supplied John Paul II with his principle thoughts and subject matter, which he went on to elaborate in his programmatic encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

¹⁸ Paul VI draws attention to the important role of charity, embracing the whole of mankind, in the encyclical that interests us here in §62.

John Paul II was to allude to this topic frequently during his pastoral pilgrimages to different countries and continents of the world, in the course of his speeches, in which the leading idea was that of the human being, his dignity, duties and rights. If we were to summarize these speeches in general terms,¹⁹ we might arrive at the following conclusions:

The Pope sees man's greatness and dignity especially in the fact that man, as a creature of God, carries God's image and likeness in himself. The Son of God, by his incarnation and acceptance of human nature, honoured the human being, and the Holy Spirit, who has made His dwelling in man, completed the rest of God's work. How rich in content and how compelling to deep reflection is John Paul II's saying that "man cannot be fully understood without Christ".²⁰ Man then, because he is related to God, is great and deserves special recognition.

Man's dignity, as the Pope says, is founded on the fact that he is a rational being. This ensures his particular position in the world, his freedom and responsibility. Considering man's freedom, the Pope also raises the subject of human rights, which are man's due, by virtue of his humanity. John Paul II states that "these rights refer to the satisfying of the basic needs of man, to his using freedom to the best advantage, to his relations with other people. Notwithstanding, they always and everywhere refer to man, to his whole human dimension".²¹ The Pope contends that these rights are inviolable and inalienable, he enumerates them in his speech delivered at the 34th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Among others he mentions the following: The human being has a right to life and biological development, as well as to spiritual development. Speaking of spiritual development, the Pope states that by this right man is to have access to education, to knowledge, to culture, to the education of himself and his children in such schools as uphold his worldview.

In connection with the right to spiritual development, the Pope stresses the right to freedom, in particular religious freedom, to which man is entitled by virtue of the fact that he is a human person possessing reason and a free will, who should always freely endeavour to seek the truth, particularly in the domain of religion.²²

19 Cf. Jan Paweł II w Ameryce Łacińskiej, *Przemówienia i homilie*, Warszawa 1980, pp. 154-158; *Jean Paul II et le droit de l'homme*, Fribourg 1980; *Przemówienie na sesji Międzynarodowej Organizacji Pracy*, „L'Osservatore Romano” (wyd. pol.) 3/2(1982), pp. 19-20; Jan Paweł II, *Nauczanie społeczne 1978-1979*, Warszawa 1982

20 Cf. *The Pope's speech during the 34th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations*, „Życie i Myśli” 30/2 (1980).

21 The Pope speaks in detail on the subject in the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* §33,44.

22 Cf. *Decree on Religious Freedom*, nr 1

The Pope very often refers to man's rights to marriage and family in his speeches, which fact may be taken to be a specific commentary to statements of GS,²³ as well as Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.²⁴ Here the Pope is unambiguous when he stresses the right to monogamous and indissoluble marriages, to the sanctity of family life based on love and fertility, as well as to the right of parents to the upbringing of their children. Regardless of the aforementioned rights, the Holy Father, passing on to social issues, stresses the right of man to possess earthly goods, as well as to his participation in social and economic life. John Paul II was to raise this question frequently on his journeys to well developed countries, especially those of Latin America, where he perceived a great disparity between the wealthy and the poor. Here, almost without exception, he began addresses with reference to biblical texts, stating that the human being, by God's will, has a predetermined right to sufficient material goods as may enable him to lead a life worthy of a human being, of God's creation on earth. John Paul II referred to this subject during his third pilgrimage to Poland between the 8th and 14th of June 1987, when he preached to Polish farmers in Tarnów on the occasion of the beatification of the blessed Caroline Kózka: "In a particular way, I wish to address (...) those whose vocation is the country life and farm labour. To Polish farmers present here by delegation (...) Of course, agriculture means bread (...) we are all much concerned that no one on our planet should lack bread (...) that it should not be lacking in our Fatherland (...) As a guest and participant of the Second National Eucharistic Congress, I come in order to pray, here in Tarnów, with my countrymen: "Give us this day our daily bread" (...) we all agree in the whole world that a lack of bread, wherever this occurs, is a scandal (...) there cannot be a lack of bread on earth."²⁵ This statement contains not only an endorsement of man's right to land, but also expresses the Holy Father's deep concern that a decent living standard be attained by farmers in Poland and throughout the world.

The above remarks, presented in broad terms, may be considered to be a preparation and introduction to a proper understanding of the meaning and importance of John Paul II's last encyclical "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis". Not only do they all constitute a starting point for the Holy Father for his further reflections, but they find in his encyclical their elaboration and full justification.

23 GS devotes much space to the subject: §47-52.

24 Cf. *Populorum Progressio* §26, where the Pope particularly emphasizes the monogamic and lasting character of the family, formed according to God's thought. Cf. Mt 19:6.

25 Cf. The Holy Father's homily during Holy Mass in Tarnów on the 10th of June 1987, published in „Currenda”, commemorative issue, Tarnów.

Special emphasis should be placed on the Holy Father's insistence in his encyclical on the proper balance between the spiritual and somatic needs of man. As a spiritual and physical being, man has a right to spiritual and physical development, says the Pope. If John Paul II speaks of the spiritual needs of the human being, it is to remind us of what was already stated in GS and the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, as well as of what he said on numerous occasions, in respect of two particular instances: that man as God's creation is His image and is therefore destined to share God's supernatural life, and that as a being, which by its origin is linked to God, has a right to religious life. Therefore the need for religious life in man is not a "supplement" to his life, but has its source in man's nature and his deepest inner needs.

Further discourse of the Pope concerning, in general, man's earthly life is based on this foundation. As St. Augustine said, God created the world for man, out of love for man and therefore, in a sense, this world belongs to man. Let us go further and add that the world is thus the common possession of all people. In the statements of John Paul's predecessors as well as in his own, the words of Scripture recur, which God addressed to those he had created: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). In order to duly observe this commandment of God, one needs to bear in mind what sort of rights the human being possesses on earth and the duties the Creator has enjoined upon him. The subject of the rights and obligations of man is not only one raised by John Paul II's predecessors, albeit in a general and somewhat oblique fashion, but it is a favourite subject in John Paul's spoken words and the written pages of his documents. We shall fully understand the subject only when we consider it against the background of earlier ecclesiastical documents and in the context of the "status" which Pope John Paul II has bestowed on the subject.

The Pope always insists on the proper balance between the supernatural and earthly life of the human being. By vigorously emphasizing the spiritual need of man, he affirms on the basis of this development, the need for the material development of man. Having this in mind and warning of present dangers, he not only focuses on the lamentable aberrations evident in mankind's imbalanced way of living, but also proposes remedies capable of eliminating them and ensuring that man enjoys living conditions worthy of his vocation. If mankind wishes to preserve itself from final extermination, it must not only examine these means closely, but it must also radically implement them. One may say that Pope John Paul II could not be clearer in his statements on the subject, and that his opinion, presented in the encyclical that interests us here, is an attempt to awaken the conscience of the contemporary world.

JOHN PAUL II'S ANXIETY CONCERNING THE GOOD OF THE WORLD.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE ENCYCLICAL
SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS

SUMMARY

The article examines historical background of John Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987). The main argument of the article is that we can't proper understand the meaning and signification of the encyclical without knowing wider context of this encyclical which is constituted by the Second Vatican Council's documents, especially the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*), John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* and Paul VI's social encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. We can better understand the meaning of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* in the light of following ideas contained within above mentioned documents: the dignity of the human being, the idea of man as the subject of the rights and obligations, man's social nature, and Christian concept of development.