"IUSTITIA EST AMOR": LOVE AS PRINCIPLE OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE?

Martin Schlag*

SUMMARY: *1. Formulating the Question. 2. Justice and Mercy as Twin Social Principle. 2.1. The Stoics. 2.2. Charity as a Social Principle in the Holy Scripture? 2.3. Justice and Love in Early Christian Theology. 2.3.1. Lactantius. 2.3.2. Ambrose. 2.3.3. Augustine. 2.3.4. Leo the Great. 3. Systematical Reflections on "Social Charity". 4. Conclusion.*

1. Formulating the Question

THE very title of Benedict XVI's social encyclical *"Caritas in veritate"* underscores the Pope's wish to promote love or charity as a principle of contemporary social life. He writes:

«Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity, which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36- 40). It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with neighbor; it is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)».[1]

On the one hand, this principle is not new to the social doctrine of the Popes. Leo XIII pointed to love, friendship and fraternity as the fundamental principles governing the relationship between the different groups of society.[2] Pius XI referred to "social justice" and "social charity" as the supreme structural elements in the economy; these two principles, not unrestricted competition, were to be the steering wheels of the economy.[3] Paul VI coined the expression "civilization of love";[4] and John Paul II identified all these expressions with his preferred concept of solidarity.[5] Even before "Caritas in veritate," the "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church" encouraged the rediscovery of charity as "the highest and universal criterion of the whole of social

* Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, Facoltà di Teologia, Piazza Sant'Apollinare 49, 00186 Roma. E-mail: schlag@pusc.it

[1] Enc. *Caritas in veritate*, Nr. 2.   [2] Enc. *Rerum novarum*, Nr. 18-21.
[3] Enc. *Quadragesimo anno*, Nr. 89.
[4] *Message World Day for Peace 1977*, AAS 68 (1976), 709.
[5] Enc. *Centesimus annus*, Nr. 10.

ethics." As from an "inner wellspring" the values of truth, freedom and justice are born and grow from love.[6]

On the other hand, however, Pope Benedict XVI's words as quoted above pose several questions. What substance does charity possess as "the principle of macro-relationships?" How does it relate to justice? How can charity be defined as a social principle, considering that love cannot be institutionalized and considering that social ethics are structural, not individual, ethics?

2. Justice and Mercy as Twin Social Principle

The insight that strict justice alone does not suffice to create an ordered society is not exclusively a product of the painful "social question" during the 19th century. Nor is this realization of purely Christian origin. Two streams of tradition merge to establish charity as a social principle: the pre-Christian Greek philosophy and the biblical teachings of God's justice and mercy, and of fraternity among all people as a consequence of God's universal paternity.

2. 1. *The Stoics*

The Stoic philosophy taught that compassion and mercy were personal weaknesses, even a spiritual disease, which threatened to disturb the sage's tranquility of mind.[7] In spite of this negative attitude, Stoics did hold that justice did not suffice as a social principle and had to be complemented by beneficence. Cicero, for instance, belonged to the Middle Stoics and introduced the works of Panaetius and Posidonius into the Latin world, thereby also conveying Stoicism's concepts to the Latin Church Fathers. Cicero upheld two social principles: justice and beneficence (*"beneficentia", "liberalitas"*). Of these two he attributed greater importance to justice. In his own words:

«Of the three remaining divisions, the most extensive in its application is the principle by which society and what we may call its "common bonds" are maintained. Of this again there are two divisions – justice, in which is the crowning glory of the virtues (*"virtutis splendor"*) and on the basis of which men are called "good men" (*"viri boni"*); and, close akin to justice, charity (*"beneficentia"*), which may also be called kindness (*"benignitas"*) or generosity (*"liberalitas"*). The first office of justice is to keep one man from doing harm to another, unless provoked by wrong; and the next is to lead men to use common possessions for the common interests, private property for their own».[8]

Cicero thus upheld two social principles of which justice was the first and more important. Of the second principle, however, that is of charity and gen-

---

[6] Papal Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, LEV, Vatican City 2005, Nr. 204 ff.

[7] Cfr. W. Schwer, *Barmherzigkeit*, RAC 1, 1950, p. 1203.

[8] Cicero, *De officiis*, I, 7 (20).

erosity he says: «Nothing appeals more to the best in human nature than this, but it calls for the exercise of caution in many particulars».[9] The caution which Cicero recommends refers mainly to not exceeding one's financial means and therewith damaging one's own family. Indeed, Cicero states, «Nothing is generous if it is not at the same time just».[10] Generosity should be demonstrated towards everyone while at the same time respecting varying degrees in social bonds.[11] Cicero placed the family as most intimate union in the first position,[12] then came friends. Amongst these he prioritized the virtuous and the benefactors. «The interests of society, however, and its common bonds will be best preserved, if kindness be shown to each individual in proportion to the closeness of his relationship».[13] As a follower of the Stoic school, Cicero perceived all men to be united by universal friendship. This made him assume that the use of material goods was destined to serve all people. At the same time he justified the existence of private property. Nature produced everything for the common use of mankind. All men are friends, and friends use all things in common. Thus all men are united in a common bond.

2. 2. *Charity as a Social Principle in the Holy Scripture?*

The qualitative increase which the Judeo-Christian revelation brought to the pagan world with respect to generosity and mercy, social justice and social charity has been pointedly described by Ernst Dassmann, who holds, «the *liberalitas* of late antiquity [was] as dissimilar to *caritas* as paganism to Christianity».[14]

In the Old Testament, God is characterized as just and merciful.[15] The explicit combination of both expressions is seldom found in the Old Testament,[16] whereas the term "merciful and gracious God" is repeated often. Justice is rooted in jurisprudence. In a society characterized by social inequality, a fair judge is obliged to assist the disadvantaged. «You shall not pervert jus-

---

[9] *Ibidem*, I, 14 (42).

[10] «*Nihil est enim liberale, quod non idem iustum*» (*ibidem*, I, 14 (43)).

[11] «*Gradus autem plures sunt societatis hominum*» (*ibidem*, I, 17 (53)).

[12] Only in connection with the family does Cicero use the word "love": «*Sanguinis autem coniunctio et benivolentia devincit homines (et) caritate*» (*ibidem*, I, 17 (54)).

[13] *Ibidem*, I, 16 (50).

[14] E. DASSMANN, *Nächstenliebe unter den Bedingungen der Knappheit. **Zum Problem der Prioritäten und Grenzen der Karitas in frühchristlicher Zeit***, in IDEM, *Ausgewählte kleine Schriften zur Patrologie, Kirchengeschichte und christlichen Archäologie*, «Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum», Ergänzungsband 37 (2011), Aschendorff, Münster 2011, p. 277 ff., p. 278.

[15] Cfr. *Ex* 34, 6: The LORD, the LORD, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity. See also *Neh* 9,31; *Ps* 86,15; 103,8; 111,4; 112,4; 116,5; 145,8. *Dt* 32,4: «The Rock – how faultless are his deeds, how right all his ways! A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he!».   [16] For example in *Tob* 3,2; *Ps* 112,4; 116,5.

tice for the needy among you in a lawsuit» (*Ex* 23,6). «A fair judge must also be a merciful judge, one who has a heart for the poor…Justice, therefore, is in practice also mercy as an awareness of suffering and as assistance to those in need».[17] This explanation defines what God does: He is just because he is merciful and because he sides with the weak, the poor and the oppressed.[18]

A person striving to imitate God must do so in the side-by-side path of justice and mercy.[19] The Old Testament continued the semantic shift, already formulated in Egypt, of the words mercy and benevolence,[20] restricting them to "pity for the poor" and finally to donations to the poor and to almsgiving.[21] In the New Testament, the term '*eleemosyne*' came to be used to express 'alms,' as evidenced in its use in Romance languages and thence also in the English word "alms". In Greek, however, there were many other words to express the central definition of mercy and compassion in the *New Testament*, for example *splagchon, eleos, oiktirmos* and their associated derivatives which are present in Jesus' teaching. Jesus' double commandment of loving God and loving one's neighbor, for instance, embraced the old and new meaning of mercy and benevolence with an absoluteness which startled his followers. Basing one's entire existence on God demands the dissolution of all bonds except the bond to God alone. The love of God signifies the determination to renounce all things except God. The Lord names two powers which man must renounce if he is to love God: mammon and the addiction to prestige. Furthermore Jesus' disciples must expect persecutions as testing ordeals. Jesus links the love of God to the love of neighbor and even to love of the enemy, the second commandment equal to the love of God. Jesus liberates the love of neighbor from the borders of ethnicity and directs it towards the helpless man lying on the side of the road. In the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus establishes an example of a person who fulfills the commandment to charity by practic-

---

[17] H.-J. BENEDICT, *Barmherzigkeit und Diakonie. Von der rettenden Liebe zum gelingenden Leben*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 2008, p. 13 ff.

[18] Cfr. *Ps* 103,6: «The LORD does righteous deeds, brings justice to all the oppressed».

[19] Cfr. *Tob* 12,9; *Prv* 21,21.

[20] The Hebrew words *"rachamim"* (mercy) and *"häsäd"* (benevolence, clemency) are often found together. *"Rachamim"* originally means "womb," as the perceived base of empathetic emotions. In its oral use it designates charity and mercy which extend from the higher to the lower. Four-fifths of all the Biblical references with the root "rchm" have God as the subject or actor. Through his *"rachamim"*, God places human beings in a parent-child relationship, which protects and restores the people of Israel. God's compassion replaces his anger. (For further evidence see E. JENNI - C. WESTERMANN (edd.), *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament (THAT)*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Gütersloh 2004⁶, vol. 2, p. 761 ff. *"Häsäd"* (benevolence, goodness, clemency) is not limited to a relational direction between a higher-up and a weaker party, but occurs in reciprocity. (See further *THAT*, vol. 1, p. 600 ff.

[21] See W. SCHER, *RAC 1*, 1950, p. 1202; H. BOLKESTEIN - W. SCHER, *Keyword "almsgiving" ("Almosen")*, in *RAC 1*, 1950, p. 301 ff.

ing mercy. Of the three persons involved, only the Samaritan abides by the commandment to love one's neighbor. The priest and the Levite who pass by obey the ethical codex of the purity laws. They do not touch the motionless injured man, since he could already be dead, and to touch a cadaver would make them unclean. The priest and the Levite want to be clean before God, without reaching down to the injured man. The Samaritan transcends these moral beliefs. He rises to true divine worship by abasing himself to serve the injured and in the process making himself ritually unclean. Exceeding the spirit of casuistry, Jesus challenges the scribes not to ask who one's neighbor might be and not to make distinctions based on the closeness or distance of the relationship, but actively to turn to one's neighbor in need, depending on the case and situation at hand. God also acts towards us in this way.

In the synoptic gospels Jesus proclaims and brings forgiveness of sins (*"afesis"*), God's mercy. Accordingly, the exhortation to mercy and forgiveness is at the forefront of man's calling to holiness and to emulate God: «Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful» (*Lc* 6,36).[22]

2. 3. *Justice and Love in Early Christian Theology*

The exceptional social dynamic which arose from Jesus' postulation in this and other scriptural passages, such as the eschatological discourse, induced the early Christian community in Jerusalem to associate liturgy, *kerygma* and *catechesis* with *diaconia* (*Acts* 2,42-47; 4,32-36). The endeavor to realize charity as a social principle was evident in the early Christians from the beginning onwards. However, the first generations of Christians encountered great difficulties in this endeavor. Foremost there existed an initial, practically insurmountable, difficulty in the harsh fact of the number of poor, the extent of material disparities and the magnitude of poverty. The small Christian community could not be expected to have the financial power and the energy to relieve the social injustice in the entire Roman empire. The reaction to this situation was to reduce the radius of those entitled to assistance. Soon the Christian duty of charity and assistance applied not to all humankind, but only to brothers and sisters in Christ.[23]

---

[22] On the above-mentioned see E. STAUFFER, *Keyword "agape"*, in G. KITTEL (Publ.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 1, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart (Studienausgabe 1990), p. 44 ff.

[23] Cfr. *Jas* 2,15 ff.: «What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?». For a more detailed account of this set of problems cfr. E. DASSMANN, *Nächstenliebe unter den Bedingungen der Knappheit. Zum Problem der Prioritäten und Grenzen der Karitas in frühchristlicher Zeit*, cit., p. 284 ff.

A further, related difficulty was the New Testament moral guidance, with its marked character of an individual ethic, which distracted attention from the formal aspect intrinsic to social ethics. Here too can the parable of the Good Samaritan serve as an example. From the point of view of social ethics the reactions and consequences after the unjust robbery would be different. This does not diminish the importance of the Samaritan's mercy but both types of ethics require different mindsets for or logics of response. A solution based on social ethics strives for the creation of social and legal structures which can intervene in a preventive, accompanying and sustainable manner. Examples of socially ethic solutions would be taking measures to relieve poverty and to re-socialize convicts, so that robbery might not occur in the first place. Or installing a police force to make the streets safe. Or establishing emergency and health services which as institutions take responsibility for the transport, accommodation, healing and caring of the sick, as opposed to the Samaritan and the host, who carry these burdens individually. Or to ensure a functioning justice system, which prosecutes crimes in a timely manner and makes sure that criminals are rehabilitated. These are just a few examples of institutions based on social ethics. A solution based on individual ethics only addresses individual persons and their duties.

Reducing love to its dimension of individual ethics also led to the phenomenon that in Christian tradition of charity, the early Fathers of the Church called for benevolence, emphasizing the individual salvation of the wealthy donors, while attempting to motivate the rich to donate voluntarily, since mercy, beneficence and almsgiving remained optional. Structural reforms were not demanded even in those situations stridently criticized by Ambrose and Basil, in which the idle accumulation of riches not utilized for social purposes was in the hands of a few privileged families.[24] Nor were legal, structural reforms demanded when Ambrose denounced as unethical all forms of collecting interest.[25] Only in the Renaissance[26] and finally in the 19th century – as a result of the dissolution of the medieval system – did a new structural view of social problems gain acceptance.[27]

---

[24] See AMBROSE, *De nabuthe*, PL 14, p. 725 ff.; BASIL, *Homily on Lk 12,18 "I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones"*, PG 31, p. 261 ff.; *Homily against the rich*, PG 31, p. 277 ff.

[25] AMBROSE, *De Tobia*, PL 14, p. 759 ff.

[26] For the motivational shift in helping behavior from the High Middle Ages in the transition to the Early Modern Age, see A. KECK, *Das philosophische Motiv der Fürsorge im Wandel. Vom Almosen bei Thomas von Aquin zu Juan Luis Vives' De subventione pauperum*, Echter, Würzburg 2010, Diss. Hochschule für Philosophie München. With the inception of humanism a de-personalized and unified concept of welfare is heralded.

[27] On this development see W. OCKENFELS, *Katholische Soziallehre - Stand und Entwicklung*, in L. DIVERSY (Publ), *Christentum und Politik. Stand und Entwicklung der christlichen Soziallehren. Wegweiser ins dritte Jahrtausend*, Dadder, Saarbrücken-Scheidt 1990, p. 36 ff.

The writings of the Fathers, charged by individual ethic, reflect not only the specific individual ethics character of the *New Testament* but also reflect another difficulty for the relevancy of love as a social principle. Outside of marriage and the family, it is not possible to institutionalize and structuralize love.[28] If love is manifested in the form of social institutions, it becomes (social) justice. A social institution consists of regulated services, which must be rendered by agreed service providers to their entitled recipients. These are services which *pro forma* have a legal nature when the recipient obtains an enforceable entitlement to them. The motive for granting these services may be charitable, but the services themselves mutate into rights. In this way social charity is not tangible as such, but as justice.

Due to the described difficulty to embrace the central Christian teaching of charity as a social structural principle, the Fathers of the Church made recourse to Stoic philosophy in their reflections on mercy and charity as a social principle. The early Christian theologians inculturated the Christian faith by expressing the tenets of their faith in the form of familiar philosophical terms or by criticizing Hellenistic philosophy where it was incompatible with faith (e.g. in cosmological and anthropological questions).

2. 3. 1. Lactantius

Lactantius explicitly turned to the educated elite of his time and attempted to give them an understanding of the new ideas in Christianity convincingly. For Lactantius there is no true justice without faith in God. Without God, he writes, there can be positive human laws, these however are subject to utilitarian considerations and are derived from a calculation of interest. Justice, on the other hand, originates from God and is simple and is the same for everyone.[29] Genuine virtues certainly can exist even without faith in the true God. As example Lactantius cites Cimo of Athens: he donated to the suffering, invited the poor into his home, clothed the naked and buried the dead. Nevertheless, he can be considered only a well-formed body without a head, because without faith in God all other aspects of existence lack life and meaning.[30] Lactantius, in his pagan environment, apparently could find not only justice but the seed of works of mercy as well. What is new in his formulations on the one hand is that he incorporates the works of mercy as a constitutive element when defining justice. This means that for Lactantius there can be no justice without mercy. On the other hand Lactantius goes beyond the Stoic notion of beneficence, as expressed by Cicero, by considering first and foremost the poor, the disenfranchised, in a word the lower class as the recipient of generosity and beneficence.

---

[28] It is noteworthy and significant for the standing of love as a Christian characteristic that matrimony was the only social institution of his time which Jesus changed explicitly.

[29] LACTANTIUS, *Divinae Institutiones*, VI, 9.   [30] *Ibidem*, VI, 9, 8.

Lactantius delves into this thought further along in the same book. How a person treats fellow human beings, so does that person treat God, in as much as "man is God's likeness" (*"homo dei simulacrum est"*). The first obligation of justice entails uniting with God; the second obligation is to unite with fellow man. The first obligation is religion; the second is *"misercordia"* or *"humanitas."* This second virtue is inherent only to the just and to the worshippers of God, because it alone encompasses the logic of community.[31] God endowed animals with natural immunity, but humans with a sense of community, so that man would defend, encourage and love fellow human beings and protect them against every danger. «The highest bond among men is humanity (*Summum igitur inter se hominum vinculum est humanitas*)». Whoever violates this bond is a criminal and a patricide. Since we all are descended from one man, we are all related. Therefore the greatest crime is to hate a fellow human being, even when that fellow human being damages us. We may be no one's enemy and must love our enemy, and even help an enemy in distress. We are all brothers created by one and the same God. Those who go against the law of humanity (*"ius humanitatis"*) and against God's laws (*"fas"*) by robbing, torturing, killing and extirpating are wild animals. God's commandment is to assist the weary and those that labor; to feed the hungry. As God is a loving Father, so did he want us to be social beings.[32] We should see ourselves in others: we do not deserve assistance when we are in danger if we do not help others in danger; we do not deserve support if we ourselves deny support to others. The philosophical ethical systems, affirms Lactantius, had not developed further in this aspect: for although they often speak of a sense of community, their inclemency makes them far removed from any sense of community.

In another passage Lactantius criticizes Zeno, the Stoic, for viewing mercy, the "greatest of all virtues," as a disease, because indeed *"misercordia"* is dear to God and necessary for humans.[33] Once again Lactantius substantiates this assessment with reciprocity: who does not want to count on the help of others when he himself is needy? It does not matter whether it is termed *humanitas* or *pietas*. What matters is the basic stance, which is only given to man. With this stance we help one another, otherwise we live like the animals do.

2. 3. 2. Ambrose

The great bishop of Milan called his moral instruction of the clergy *"De officiis"* and based his book on the work of Cicero with the same name. Ambrose partly paraphrased Cicero's work and in part expanded upon it with biblical examples and Christian insertions.

---

[31] *Ibidem*, VI, 10.
[32] «*Deus enim quoniam pius est, animal nos voluit esse sociale*» (Div. Inst. VI, 10, 10).
[33] LACTANTIUS, *Epitome divinarum institutionum*, 33, 6.

Ambrose borrowed word for word Cicero's double social principle of justice and beneficence *(justitia et beneficentia)*. «The inner structure and logic of society consists of two parts: justice and beneficence, which is also called generosity and benevolence. Justice appears to me to be the more noble, generosity the more amiable. Justice provides the standard for a strict scrutiny of morals; generosity grants benevolence».[34] This passage paraphrases Cicero almost word for word. Ambrose goes beyond the Stoic prototype by dividing *"beneficentia"* (beneficence) into *"benevolentia"* (benevolence) and *"liberalitas"* (generosity). Beneficence is composed of both benevolence and generosity; without them beneficence would not be complete. It is not enough to want good (*"bene volere"*), one also has to do good. By the same token it is also not enough to do good; doing good must spring from a good source, namely from good will.[35] Benevolence is more than generosity, since it may sometimes be impossible to be generous due to a lack of material means. Good will, on the other hand, is always possible. Benevolence is like a common mother binding everyone in friendship. Benevolence is expressed in dependable advice, in joy over someone else's good welfare, in sorrow over someone else's affliction. «Remove benevolence from human dealings and you have removed the sun from the world; for without benevolence there are no human dealings: showing a stranger the way, correcting the errant, returning hospitality are all fruits of benevolence. It is like a spring of water which refreshes the thirsty».[36]

2. 3. 3. Augustine

In his main work of social theory, "City of God," Augustine emphasizes above all that justice is the principle which structures society. Without justice, cities are nothing more than bands of robbers (*De civitate Dei* IV, 4). Augustine, similar to Lactantius, advocates a religious-based theory of justice: a man and a nation who do not adore the true God do not possess justice. From this standpoint, the Roman Empire was never a true *"res publica"*.

For Augustine the earthly common good is the collective sharing in the highest good (*"summum bonum"*). The highest good exists in God or to be precise in taking pleasure in God (*"frui Deo"*). We should utilize (*"uti"*) earthly things but should not look for happiness in them, for happiness can only stem from pleasure in God, the highest good. Augustine did not uphold a separate theory of "social charity" which explicitly used that term. However, in many passages the idea of charity as a social principle is perceptible.

---

[34] «*Societatis enim ratio dividitur in partes duas: iustitiam et beneficentiam quam eamdem liberalitatem et benignitatem vocant; iustitia mihi excelsior videtur, liberalitas gratior; illa censuram tenet, ista bonitatem*» (AMBROSE, *De officiis*, I, 28, 130).

[35] AMBROSE, *De officiis*, I, 30, 143.   [36] *Ibidem*, I, 32, 167.

This perception applies generally because Augustine grants love *the* central and defining place in moral life.[37] As is well known, Augustine defines all virtues from the viewpoint of love, whereby he delineates the four cardinal virtues as manifestations of love. Even justice is «charity, which serves only the beloved and therefore governs well».[38]

Justice governs objectively and in line with reason, not with the «*libido dominandi*»[39] (desire for domination), which Augustine accuses the Roman Empire of doing. Augustine makes it immediately clear that justice towards fellow human beings has to do with the love of God. It does not have to do with any kind of love, but with the love of God, the highest good. Therefore one can also describe justice as charity, «which serves God alone, and therefore can put into good order the other things, which are governable by man».[40]

Such an interpretation of justice based on the love of God is hardly applicable to the modern interpretation of justice. To raise such a virtue to a social principle could not be reconciled with the liberal principle of our social order as it presupposes a religious creed. Indeed, even Thomas Aquinas did not take up the Augustinian definition of justice and criticized Augustine's lack of differentiation between the association with God, in which no equality between God and man can be attained, and the association of human beings amongst one another in which equality and thus justice are achievable. Aquinas accepts the love of God as a motivation for interpersonal justice, but he differentiates the two concepts clearly.[41] With all the brilliance and acuity of his opinions Augustine writes passionately as a rhetorician and as a pastor, not as a calculating systematic theologian. One must not absolutize his sometimes absolute-sounding principles, but must read them in the context of his complete oeuvre, where their hard edges are buffed by real life and understanding of human nature, where the absolutes blend into the contemplation of faith in a harmonious and balanced manner and so remain fruitful for their respective time.

In this respect Augustine differentiated between the supernatural *"caritas"* as a virtue of the transcendent City of God, on one hand, and selfcontrol beneficence, justice and concord, which served as social principles for worldly society, on the other hand. God's authority entrusts us with these and other virtues, so that we not only lead our earthly life in a morally upstanding way and build

---

[37] Cfr. for example *Enchiridion de fide, spe et caritate*, XXXII, 121: «All the divine precepts are, therefore, referred back to love. Thus every commandment harks back to love».

[38] «*Iustitia, amor soli amato serviens, et propterea recte dominans*; [...]» (AUGUSTINE, *De moribus ecclesiae Catholicae*, I, 15 (25); NBA XIII/1, p. 52 ff.).

[39] AUGUSTINE, *De civitate Dei*, XIV, 28.

[40] «*Iustitiam, amorem deo tantum servientem, et ob hoc bene imperantem caeteris quae homini subiecta sunt*; [...]» (AUGUSTINE, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae*, I, 15 (25); NBA XIII/1, p. 52 ff.).

[41] THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 57, a. 1, ad 3; q. 58, a. 1, ad 6.

a peaceful and harmonious society and earth, but also so that through these virtues we can attain eternal salvation. We can only become citizens of God's heavenly kingdom through the virtues of faith, hope and charity. As long as we are on the road towards God's kingdom, we must endure those who want to maintain an earthly state without penalizing the vices. In contrast the first Romans built and expanded their state through virtues. Although they did not worship the true God, they still possessed a certain amount of propriety which sufficed to found, strengthen and maintain the body politic.[42] The distinction between the level of natural virtues and the level of supernatural virtues is markedly clear in these words. Augustine recognizes and affirms the possibility of at least a "respectable" secular state. Likewise it is unmistakable that Augustine, in continuation and further development of the Platonic-Stoic inheritance, places morals such as benevolence, self-control and unity next to justice. In this sense Augustine also recognizes the Ciceronian double social principle of "justice and beneficence". Augustine, however, expands this to a triple principle consisting of justice, benevolence and piety:

«It is due to innocence that we do not hurt anyone; due to benevolence that we encourage others as much as is in our power to do so; due to piety that we worship God».[43]

Augustine also elaborates clearly the social nature of human beings and the universal friendship among all people. «Human nature is something social», he wrote explicitly.[44] The social character of human nature embodies a great good for man and grants the strength for friendship (*"vim amicitiae"*).[45] What is particularly significant is that Augustine does not speak of the "political" character of human nature, as might seem obvious based on Aristoteles, but rather speaks of human nature's social, communal character. Human fellow-

---

[42] «*In ista enim conluvie morum pessimorum et veteris perditae disciplinae maxime venire ac subvenire debuit caelestis auctoritas, quae voluntariam paupertatem, quae continentiam, benivolentiam, iustitiam atque concordiam veramque pietatem persuaderet ceterasque vitae luminosas validasque virtutes non tantum propter istam vitam honestissime gerendam nec tantum propter civitatis terrenae concordissimam societatem verum etiam propter adipiscendam sempiternam salutem et sempiterni cuiusdam populi caelestem divinamque rem publicam, cui nos cives adsciscit fides, spes, caritas, ut, quam diu inde peregrinamur, feramus eos, si corrigere non valemus, qui vitiis inpunitis volunt stare rem publicam, quam primi romani constituerunt auxeruntque virtutibus etsi non habentes veram pietatem erga deum verum, quae illos etiam in aeternam ciuitatem posset salubri religione perducere, custodientes tamen quandam sui generis probitatem, quae posset terrenae civitati constituendae, augendae conservandaeque sufficere*» (*Epistula* 138, 17; CCL XXXI B, p. 287 ff.).

[43] «*Innocentia est, qua nulli nocemus; benivolentia, qua etiam prosumus, cui possumus; pietas, qua colimus deum*» (*De mendacio* 19, 40; NBA VII/2, p. 382). Cicero emphasized innocence as the primary element of justice. *Pars pro toto* for Augustine innocence stands for justice.

[44] «*Sociale quiddam est humana natura*» (AUGUSTINE, *De bono coniugali* 1, 1; NBA VII/1, p. 10 ff.). [45] *Ibidem.*

ship reaches further than simple politics or the relation to only one *polis*: we are connected to all people in friendship through our common human nature.

Augustine borrows Cicero's definition of friendship: the «benevolent and loving agreement on human and divine matters».[46] From the general Stoic tradition he adopts the concept of a structure for the ties of friendship in levels or concentric circles originating with blood relatives. Benevolence, *"benevolentia"* is the decisive triggering moment of the friendship uniting human beings.[47] Indeed, God willed friendship for man; it is vital for mankind.[48] Friendship presupposes an invisible bond of faith in the reciprocity of love between friends. Without reciprocity, friendship would not be possible, because friendship is not one-sided, but requited, reciprocal benevolence. Augustine utilizes this simple human experience as a fundamental theological argument for the possibility of faith in that which cannot be seen. If faith in invisible things were impossible, friendship would become impossible, because reciprocal love cannot be seen. Excluding human faith from human affairs would cause havoc.[49] With this argument, he embraces a concept dealt with in *"Caritas in veritate"*: namely, the importance of reciprocity and gratitude as social principles.[50]

Despite his emphasis on benevolence and related virtues as social principles, Augustine remains a realist when it comes to the substantiality of crimes and wrongdoings. Augustine's main statement to the topic reads: mercy is fake if it serves to encourage vices. Forgiveness requires an acknowledgement of evil. He who shies away from punishing a child because he is afraid the child will cry is not merciful.[51]

---

[46] «*Amicitia rectissime atque sanctissime definita est rerum humanarum et divinarum cum benivolentia et caritate consensio*» (AUGUSTINE, *Contra Academicos*, III, 6, 13; NBA III, 120; Epistula 258, 1; NBA XXIII, p. 884).

[47] «*Ubi enim benivolentia, ibi amicizia*» (AUGUSTINUS, *De sermone Domini in monte*, I, 11, 31; CCL XXXV, 32).   [48] See AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 299 D, 1; NBA XXXIII, p. 414 ff.

[49] «*Si auferatur haec fides de rebus humanis, quis non attendat, quanta earum perturbatio et quam horrenda confusio subsequatur? Quis enim mutua caritate diligetur ab aliquo, cum sit invisibilis ipsa dilectio, si quod non video, credere non debeo? Tota itaque peribit amicitia, quia nonnisi mutuo amore constat. quid enim eius poterit ab aliquo recipere, si nihil eius creditum fuerit exhiberi? Porro amicitia pereunte neque conubiorum neque cognationum et affinitatum vincula in animo servabuntur, quia et in his utique amica consensio est*» (*De fide rerum invisibilium*, 4; CCL XLVI, 4).

[50] Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, Nr. 34 ff. Gestures of friendship are made as an expression of selfless and disinterested charity. However, if they are to continue, these gestures need to be reciprocated, if not immediately then within a reasonably expected time. If reciprocation does not occur, no friendship can emerge. Although one soliciting a friendship subjectively views the soliciting of a true friendship as unconditional and without reservation, friendship itself, when viewed objectively, is conditioned in its existence. **Friendship is conditional unconditionality.**   [51] See AUGUSTINE, *Epistula* 104, 15f; CCL 31B, p. 46 ff.

2. 3. 4. Leo the Great

Leo the Great in some sermons appeals for donations for the poor. In these sermons he also mentions goodness (*benignitas*), benevolence (*benevolentia*), mercy (*misericordia*) and friendship (*amicitia*) as social principles.[52] Certainly Leo's emphasis is less an expression of common social theory, but more so an indication of the significant decrease in the enthusiastic willingness to donate, which had marked the early ecstatic Christian community. Leo, however, treats as a certainty the association of justice with mercy. To love God is nothing other than to love justice. May the virtue of mercy be consorted with the aspiration for justice.[53]

3. Systematical Reflections on "Social Charity"

The historical introduction to the topic analyzed two currents of tradition which were essential for the Christian faith and its social aspects: pre-Christian Platonic-Stoic philosophy – adopted by the Fathers of the Church – and the Bible. The historical introduction was an attempt – by way of revelation and reason – to answer the questions about social charity posed in *Caritas in veritate* and formulated at the beginning of this article.

It became evident that in the Christian tradition justice alone was not viewed as a sufficient means to order society. A second, complementary principle is needed. Whereas justice was analyzed in concrete detail and evolved into judicial order, the second principle remained rather vague. Various terms are used for the second principle: mercy, beneficence, benevolence, generosity, etc. As important as the second principle is, it remains emotional and insubstantial and is an appeal to generosity.

The remainder of the work aims to bring greater clarity to the subject by delineating various opinions represented in the framework of Catholic theological thought on the term social charity. Most of the opinions revolve around the most pointed formulation of this principle in Pius XI's encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*. Pius XI refers to social charity explicitly three times and implicitly one further time. These references are always in direct relation to justice. On the one hand it becomes evident that in Pius' opinion charity has an ancillary and mitigating effect in those cases where justice fails. On the other hand Pius XI regards charity as the soul of social justice.[54] Not since that time has the

---

[52] See Leo, *Tractatus*, vi-xi; CCL 138, p. 27 ff.

[53] Leo comments on the Beatitudes and the commandment of love in the Shema Israel: «[...] *nihil est aliud diligere Deum quam amare iustitiam. Denique sicut illic dilectioni Dei proximi cura subiungitur, ita et hic desiderio iustitiae virtus misericordiae copulatur, et dicitur: Beati misericordes* [...]» (Leo, *Tractatus*, xcv, 7; CCL 138A, p. 588)

[54] As a reminder a few vital excerpts from the text are given; (bold print indicates author's emphasis):

term "social charity" been used with such immediacy and clarity. *Caritas in veritate* draws on the language of *Quadragesimo anno*.

Oswald von Nell-Breuning, who is considered one of the main authors of *Quadragesimo anno,* writes that social charity is imbued with the power of cleansing self-interestedness and egotism, which rouses sentiments of benevolence towards fellow human beings. Social charity, however, does not substantially add anything to social justice.[55] Gustav Gundlach also contributed to the encyclical's content and writes similarly. In a commentary to *Quadragesimo anno* Gundlach characterizes social charity as the "soul" of social justice. It might seem as if relationships of human beings in society are formed solely through norms and duties of a statutory and legal nature. Therefore Pius XI added that «relationships of a personal nature» and «the cordial advocacy of one human being for another» may not be absent.[56] Gundlach continues that it would be erroneous to expect society's renewal from justice alone; the hearts of human beings can only be united by love. «Because this love in the Pope's opinion should downright pervade in social institutions and relationships, he referred to it as 'social charity' in his encyclical». Gundlach defines social charity as the «attitude of fellowship and unity, in which all human beings converge as children of one Father in heaven and as those redeemed by the Savior». Through this charity society resembles the mysterious body of Christ.[57]

«88. [...] *Just as the unity of human society cannot be founded on an opposition of classes, so also the right ordering of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces.* [...] *But free competition, while justified and certainly useful provided it is kept within certain limits, clearly cannot direct economic life.* [...] Therefore, it is most necessary that economic life be again subjected to and governed by a true and effective directing principle. (…) Loftier and nobler principles – social justice and social charity – must, therefore, be sought whereby this dictatorship may be governed firmly and fully. Hence, the institutions themselves of peoples and, particularly those of all social life, ought to be penetrated with this justice, and it is most necessary that it be truly effective, that is, establish a juridical and social order which will, as it were, give form and shape to all economic life. Social charity, moreover, ought to be as the soul of this order, [...]» 137. «But in effecting all this, the law of charity, "which is the bond of perfection", must always take a leading role. How completely deceived, therefore, are those rash reformers who concern themselves with the enforcement of justice alone – and this, commutative justice – and in their pride reject the assistance of charity! Admittedly, no vicarious charity can substitute for justice which is due as an obligation and is wrongfully denied. Yet even supposing that everyone should finally receive all that is due him, the widest field for charity will always remain open. For justice alone can, if faithfully observed, remove the causes of social conflict but can never bring about union of minds and hearts».

[55] Summary of A.F. Utz, *Sozialethik*, Teil I: *Die Prinzipien der Gesellschaftslehre*, Kehrle, Heidelberg und Nauwelaerts, Löwen 1964², p. 231.

[56] G. Gundlach SJ, *Die Ordnung der menschlichen Gesellschaft*, publ. by the Katholische Sozialwissenschaftliche Zentralstelle Mönchengladbach, Bachem, Köln 1964, 2 volumes, vol. I, p. 314.   [57] *Ibidem*, p. 324.

Arthur F. Utz dealt extensively with the topic of social charity. He relates social charity directly with the common good. In general he defines social charity as «the solidarity which is founded on an ethic common good»[58]. Utz understands social charity as a virtue, on which basis the individual voluntarily and willingly takes on his functioning part in human society. According to Utz, social charity as a virtue is initially «not a virtue which is distinguishable from social justice, but only a section of the same, inasmuch as it refers to the spiritual relationship from human being to human being as required by the common good»[59]. The attainment of the common good requires both approaches, those of social justice and social charity. Social charity is however in essence only a section of justice. Our fellow human beings have, for example, a claim (and therefore a right) to a «friendly countenance, to sociable, affable behavior». We in turn have a claim and right to these manners from others. Charity can in general be seen as the bestowal of a personal good and the deferment of selfish wishes.[60]

Utz nevertheless reaches the opinion that social charity is a distinct virtue, different from social justice, due to the consideration that in reality not all human beings fulfill their social duties. In doing so, they go against social justice; thus is equality damaged, and others in turn can withdraw from the fulfillment of their duties, which would damage the common good. It is therefore necessary for social charity to come before social justice. Social charity is «the categorical and unconditional esteem of the common good […], which even then makes the effort for society when the duties cannot be distributed equitably or when it is prevented by the failure of members of society»[61]. Accordingly, Utz recognizes two virtues of the common good, that is, two different virtues which correlate to the common good: social justice and social charity.

Utz clarifies the apparent contradiction into which he gets entangled here. At "the highest level of reflection about social ethics" there is only one superior virtue of common good. That superior virtue he calls "justice of the common good" (*Gemeinwohlgerechtigkeit*). It comprises of both social justice and social charity. On the level of social reality, however, two virtues are needed, namely social justice and social charity. Social charity cannot, however, exist or be explained without referring to social justice.[62] Utz limits the term 'social charity' to that which should actually be performed according to social justice, but which under existing circumstances is not performed.[63]

---

[58] A.F. UTZ, *Sozialethik*, Teil I: *Die Prinzipien der Gesellschaftslehre*, cit., p. 167.
[59] *Ibidem*, p. 194 ff.   [60] *Ibidem*, p. 192 ff.   [61] *Ibidem*, p. 197.
[62] *Ibidem*, p. 231 ff.
[63] As outlined by J. MESSNER, *Das Naturrecht. Handbuch der Gesellschaftsethik, Staatsethik und Wirtschaftsethik*, Tyrolia, Innsbruck 1966⁶, p. 454.

Utz' approach to this question is not of a structural nature but of an individual virtues ethics nature. He does not attempt to answer the question of how a society must be structured in order to correspond to charity as a social principle. Instead Utz is concerned with what the individual must do to fulfill his social duties. In Utz' works, social charity certainly preserves its critical potential as a prerequisite virtue for the existing order. Social charity also contributes to the improvement of existing social relationships; however the focus is on the fulfillment of already existing charitable duties, not on the improvement of social structures.

Johannes Messner beholds the love of neighbor as a basic duty of one human being towards a fellow human being. The highest natural social principle is that you should love your neighbor as yourself. Justice has its deepest roots in the love of neighbor.[64] As does Utz, Messner interprets social charity on the one hand as a virtue and defines social charity as «the steadfast willingness (*habitus*) of thinking and acting out of concern for the community and the good of the community. Social charity's object and its immediate basis of obligation is thus the good of society, not the good of the individual as in the love of neighbor»[65]. In today's terminology this virtue would be called solidarity. On the other hand, Messner approaches the structural results of social charity with regard to societal order. He reaches the conclusion that charity as an objective social principle purports the existence and the promotion of small communities «according to the principle of professional and regional organization»[66]. In this excerpt the principle of subsidiarity is manifested.

In order to delineate between justice and charity, Messner designates charity as the basic principle and justice as the ordering principle of coexistence. It is indeed true that society is in essence a legal federation, not a charitable one. But without mutual benevolence there would be no peaceful coexistence. Law as an ordering principle points "above and beyond itself to the same human nature and the same human dignity". Messner continues rather academically, «The 'ontology' of law can only be perfected in the ontology of charity».[67] In any case a seminal approach is evident here, in the author's opinion, inasmuch as Messner refers to human dignity as a basic principle.

Referring to Pius XII, Anton Rauscher emphasizes the relationship between the principle of solidarity and the "basic Christian norm of charity": All human beings are members of one family, which allows them to take part of all joys, sorrows and worries of the individual members.[68] The principle of

---

[64] *Ibidem*, p. 447 ff.   [65] *Ibidem*, p. 449.   [66] *Ibidem*, p. 451 ff.

[67] *Ibidem*, 454 ff. See further B. SUTOR, *Politische Ethik. Gesamtdarstellung auf der Basis der Christlichen Gesellschaftslehre*, Schöningh, Paderborn 1991, p. 110 ff.

[68] A. RAUSCHER, *Kirche in der Welt. Beiträge zur christlichen Gesellschaftsverantwortung*, Echter, Würzburg 1988, Band I, p. 273. See also IDEM, *Zum Verhältnis von katholischer Soziallehre und Caritas*, Bachem, Köln 1999.

solidarity in itself urges «the corresponding organization and order of society towards a goal, and furthermore the implementation of and adherence to social justice».[69] «Truth and justice can only effect peace when they are joined by charity». The relationship of charity and justice is clarified; there is no contradiction between the two. Charity presumes the respect of the rights of others; charity urges human beings to open themselves up to the truth and to practice justice.[70] Rauscher emphasizes social charity both as a principle of social life and as a virtue.

Wilhelm Korff links charity with human dignity as a social principle in an approach decidedly marked by structural ethics.[71] In the 19th century a paradigm shift took place. Until then, social ethics were viewed foremost as an ethics of rules regulating behavior. Man lived in preordained and fundamentally irrevocable social structures. These structures determined the functions and duties of the individual, who through his virtues should contribute to the common good. The virtues which should be practiced were in turn a consequence of social rank and of the specific function of the affected person. Social duties were predominantly listed in the various *"spaecula"* (mirrors), which were moral handbooks on the duties of emperors, princes, bishops and later on also of merchants. In the 19th century the opinion broke ground that social structures could be altered by human beings, and we were therefore responsible for them. The questioning course of social ethics shifted from an ethics which mainly dealt with the duties of human beings subject to the predetermined social structures to a social ethics which itself questioned the justification of the structures. As an example Korff analyzes slavery. The Christian commandment of love, which revolutionized the ancient value system, did not abolish the institution of slavery, but mitigated the hard edges of the underlying societal structure by inculcating it with clemency and meekness and declaring the existing social inequality as irrelevant within itself: «There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus» (*Gal.* 3,28). Charity had the ability to revolutionize the behavioral ethic side, but not the structural ethic side. This is explained in the fact that a power of enforcement does not belong to charity. Charity cannot force or threaten compulsion as law can. Compulsion or the threat of compulsion unfortunately is necessary in order to alter social structures. Charity knows no compulsion, justice does. In the course of the paradigm shift in social ethics, the perspective on justice also shifted from a

---

[69] A. RAUSCHER, *Kirche in der Welt. Beiträge zur christlichen Gesellschaftsverantwortung*, Band I, cit., p. 274.   [70] *Ibidem*, Band II, p. 124.

[71] W. KORFF, *Stichwort „Sozialethik"*, LThK³ (2000) Band 9, p. 767ff; on the nature of social ethics also see IDEM, *Was ist Sozialethik?*, «Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift», 44 (1987), p. 327ff.

distribution and allocation according to existing structures to a question of the proper foundation and the proper standard of this distribution.

«Charity does not assess that which is due to human beings and which they should be afforded from a rationale based on those rights a person asserts for herself. A person asserts rights based on what she is structurally due, or based on what she can lay claim to on the grounds of services rendered, or based on what can be expected considering certain qualities distinguishing her from others. On the contrary, charity assesses its stance based on what befits a human being in respect of his simply being human. Moreover, charity is assessed in the face of the challenges and the deficits of the human situation in order to correspond to his dignity, to his destiny to freedom, to his calling to life – always and under any circumstance. By virtue of its own immediacy to the human condition of our fellow men, charity sets out from that point where a fellow human being in the conditionality and fractured nature of his existence reveals something which is unconditional, unalienable and universally binding: Man is "an image of God," "holy matter," "an aim in itself." It is charity that discovers that the human being is a person».[72]

Only through the "discovery chronicle of charity" and the "charging" of human thinking with consciousness of universal human dignity does the just power become aware of its duty to take the person as a standard and to structure laws according to human dignity. As a result of genuine effectivity of the Christian ideals in history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), law «finally reaches that point which charity has already reached: the point where a human being is considered as a person»[73]

In conclusion, reference should be made to the innovative sociological approach of Pierpaolo Donati.[74] Love is a semantically ambiguous concept. Love has a different meaning depending on the relational network being spoken of: filial love, parental love, sibling love, marital love, friendly affection, social charity, etc. Today a "return of love" can be observed into social areas such as economics and politics, from which the term had earlier been disassociated. Modernity had limited love to the private sphere (family, friends). The "return of love", according to Donati, is caused by a newly awakened desire for relationality and relationship in all spheres of society. "Social charity" in economics and politics is not the same love as an emotion or passion, but a "fostering of the relationship culture." Donati divides charity as a social principle into four domains. 1. In the domain of economics, charity reveals itself as solidarity to provide the necessary economic means through trust and

---

[72] W. KORFF, *Stichwort „Sozialethik"*, LThK³ (2000) Band 9, p. 772.

[73] *Ibidem*, p. 773.

[74] P. DONATI, *L'amore come cura dei beni relazionali*, unpublished manuscript, 19.-20.11.2010; IDEM, *Teoria relazionale della società: I concetti di base*, FrancoAngeli, Milano (2009⁷); summarizing S. ZAMBONI, *L'amore come principio di vita sociale*, XI Colloquio di teologia morale del Pontificio Istituto Giovanni Paolo II, «Rivista di Teologia Morale», 169 (2011), p. 91 ff.

through loans. This solidarity happens in relationships. If, for instance, a bank provides a loan to a cash-stricken company, the bank takes on a risk which was entered into out of solidarity. 2. In the political domain, Donati identifies charity as subsidiarity in terms of helping another person to fulfill her functions with respect to the bounties received. The grateful recognition of the dignity of fellow human beings also belongs in this domain. 3. In the domain of civil society charity is expressed as brotherly love. Donati conceives this as a principle of free affiliation on the basis of reciprocity. Thus emerge collectives in society, whose "*socii*" foster relationships based on a culture of values. 4. And finally in the cultural domain, charity exists in maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Divided in this manner, charity permeates all societal domains. In the economy charity leads to altruistic forms of behavior; in politics to the primacy of the common good; in civil society charity becomes a principle of brotherly reciprocity; in the family and circle of friends to a relationship of giving. Charity's power as a social principle lies in the fact that without establishing relationships through personal dedication and material gifts, no social bonds can exist, and without social bonds, a human being cannot survive. The anthropology which lies beneath such a model is an anthropology of relation. A human being flourishes as a person also through the relationships in which she is born and into which she enters consciously. Only in relation to other human beings can the deepest aspirations of a human being be fulfilled: to love and be loved, give and receive, trust and be trusted, recognize and be recognized, etc. One could define all of these aspects figuratively as "goods", but not as goods in an economic, instrumental sense. These are "social goods", "relational goods", or "affiliation goods". The foremost relational good is the common good, which is not the greatest good for the greatest number of persons, but that good which one can partake of without diminishing the same. Contrary to private possessions, the common good is communicable. One cannot swallow with the same bite, but one can eat together; one cannot make the same sound, but one can talk to another and take part in the same conversation. Material goods separate one person from another; immaterial goods unite them through participation. Relational goods are not decreased through use and sharing; on the contrary, they are increased. Analogously one cannot possess the truth for oneself. Truth is always a common good of those that cherish it.

4. Conclusion

The *Gospels* are not an immediately applicable socio-economic or political program. Christians do not have a specially patented formula which would spare us the tedious search for what is proper. «The Gospels do not contain a political course of action to build up a specifically 'Christian' economic and

societal order. The Sermon on the Mount does not – as Bismarck said – make a state».[75] On the other hand the church may not encapsulate itself in a pietistic and personal sphere, because indeed actions in the socio-economic and political domain are relevant to salvation (which does not mean that the kingdom of God can be confused with a future earthly realm).

All these concepts apply to the central Christian commandment of charity as a part of the *Gospels*. Considered as a principle of social structure, charity is not immediately applicable. Attempts to do just the same have failed. For example, Maxim Gorki wrote in 1934 referring to Soviet communism, «for the first time in history, the authentic love for mankind is organized as a creative power and aims at liberating millions of workers».[76] Considered as *"agape"* charity is the selfless gift of what is not owed – how could one organize, institutionalize or structuralize such a thing? Of the three types of friendship which in the writings of Thomas Aquinas approach closest to social charity[77], the friendship out of utility and the friendship out of pleasure are reciprocal and predictable, like a *"do et des"* (I give that you may give) relationship. A similar benefit is given in exchange for the benefit, which a friendly relationship brings. If the reciprocal response is omitted or expectations are not met, the friendship expires. Such a relationship is "symmetrical" and predictable and can be built into a system as a social principle applicable to regulations. *"Agape"*, however, is asymmetrical. Its dedication is unpredictable and not bound to the calculation of self-advantage. Love is a "wild power", wrote Maritain.[78] Love does not let itself be incorporated into a regulated social system of predictable patterns of behavior. But no one wishes to live without *"agape,"* at the very least no one can be happy without *"agape."* To borrow the imagery of St. Ambrose, love is like the sun, which warms and brightens all things.

In this respect the *Compendium* of the Social Doctrine of the Church refers to charity as the «highest and universal criterion of the whole of social ethics». As from an "inner wellspring", the principles and values of social ethics originate and develop from charity.[79]

---

[75] W. OCKENFELS, *Katholische Soziallehre - Stand und Entwicklung*, in L. DIVERSY (Publ.), *Christentum und Politik. Stand und Entwicklung der christlichen Soziallehren. Wegweiser ins dritte Jahrtausend*, Dadder, Saarbrücken-Scheidt 1990, p. 44.

[76] Prawda 23. Mai 1934 cited by J. MARITAIN, *Christlicher Humanismus. Politische und geistige Fragen einer neuen Christenheit*, Carl Pfeffer Verlag, 1950, 69. Maritain cites Hélène ISWOLSKY, *L'homme 1936 en Russie soviétique*, Courier des Iles, Paris 1936.

[77] Cfr. A.F. UTZ, *Sozialethik I*, p. 226 ff.

[78] J. MARITAIN, *Christlicher Humanismus. Politische und geistige Fragen einer neuen Christenheit*, cit., p. 69.

[79] PAPAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, LEV, Vatican City/Freiburg (2006), Nr. 204 ff.

Within the framework of social ethics understood as structural ethics, charity discovers the human being as a person. The awareness of human dignity leads to the personal principle which trusts the responsible freedom and autonomy of the individual as a moral subject and which regards the person as the «beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions»[80]. The respect for the dignity of every human being is not foremost a result of justice. It is a result of Christian charity, which bestows justice not only with new power and fortitude, but also expands its scope to all human beings, according to the breadth and depth of God's love. Love, when understood as the supernatural virtue of *"caritas"*, does not simply give the impulse to respect a fellow human being as a person, but goes beyond that measure by respecting everybody with the attitude of the limitless love with which God loves every man and woman as son and daughter and with which God redeemed them. It is interesting to note, that for instance Josemaría Escrivá linked the concept of human dignity as a social principle more to charity than to justice. He wrote,

«Be convinced that justice alone is never enough to solve the great problems of mankind. When justice alone is done, don't be surprised if people are hurt. The dignity of man, who is a son of God, requires much more. Charity must penetrate and accompany justice because it sweetens and deifies everything [...]».[81]

Human dignity demands more than justice, because human dignity is an insight which is conveyed by charity and conveys charity. Charity affirms the fellow human beings.

If *Caritas in veritate* regards charity as "at the heart of the Church's social doctrine", one can only agree. However, charity is not an immediately applicable social principle. The "primary route of charity" flows into the path of the tenets of social principles, as they have been developed by the social doctrine since the 19th century. The principles of human dignity, of the common good, of solidarity and of subsidiarity, in their mutual connectedness, express how "social charity" can concretely and tangibly be institutionally implemented in a community. But without charity, which keeps all structures and social establishments alive, everything else would break down.

ABSTRACT: *In an introduction the paper analyzes two currents of tradition which were essential for the Christian faith and its social aspects: pre-Christian Platonic-Stoic philosophy – adopted by the Fathers of the Church – and the Bible. It became evident that in the Christian tradition justice alone was not viewed as a sufficient means to order society. A second, complementary principle is needed. Various terms are used for the second principle: mercy, beneficence, benevolence, generosity, etc. As important as the second principle is, it remains emotional and insubstantial and is an appeal to generosity. Caritas in veritate regards char-*

---

[80] SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Gaudium et Spes*, Nr. 25.
[81] J. ESCRIVÁ, *Freunde Gottes*, Adamas, Köln 1979², Nr. 172.

ity as "at the heart of the Church's social doctrine". However, charity is not an immediately applicable social principle. The "primary route of charity" flows into the path of the tenets of social principles, as they have been developed by the social doctrine since the 19th century. The principles of human dignity, of the common good, of solidarity and of subsidiarity, in their mutual connectedness, express how "social charity" can concretely and tangibly be institutionally implemented in a community. But without charity, which keeps all structures and social establishments alive, everything else would break down.

STUDI