

John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*

Johannes Zabel

N.B. This text is reproduced in the form in which it was given. A more complete version will subsequently be published in book form

The encyclical of John Paul II *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS, On Social Concern) is the papal document published on the occasion of, and in commemoration of, the 20th anniversary of the encyclical of Pope Paul VI *Populorum progressio*. The main topic is the development of the entire world described from the perspective of theology, especially moral theology.

I want to stress at the beginning of my lecture the main, new points of SRS: 1) the social problem is a moral problem, and is therefore – primarily – a personal issue; 2) the virtue of solidarity is important and is strongly emphasised, compared to other documents in catholic social teaching; 3) the notion of “structural sin” is introduced, and is presented as the result of personal sins; 4) it is affirmed that the question of development belongs to the social magisterium of the church, as the title and opening words of the encyclical, “on the social concern of the church”, underline; 5) the situation in the world is described, more than in other documents, in terms of the conflict between East-West and North-South blocs.

Therefore John Paul II sets a more pessimistic view in comparison with the optimistic perspective of the 1967 *Populorum progressio*. SRS was signed by John Paul II on 30th December 1987, according to the text of the encyclical, but it was published only in February 1988.

And as a 6th element, I want to quote Pope Benedict in his encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (CiV), since he sees SRS as a new beginning: “This continual application to contemporary circumstances began with the encyclical SRS” (CiV, n.8). The application of catholic social

teaching to contemporary circumstances is one highlight of SRS.

1. Strong responses to the encyclical around the world: affirmation and criticism

The application of this encyclical to contemporary issues was also the reason for considerable controversy. The encyclical stirred a debate from the moment it was published. According to some commentators, no other social encyclical has caused such a worldwide reaction in the media. It was in North America in particular that the encyclical “provoked unusually strong reactions”. The heated response was caused by the Pope’s rejection of what he calls “the logic of blocs” – the division of the world between East and West. Some commentators in the United States saw the implication of a “moral equivalence” of Western and Eastern systems in SRS. But the Pope only wrote that both systems represent deficient models of development and both therefore need reform. And the “moral equivalence” is not complete – he clearly condemned the most socialist models of development. The Pope stands outside the two competing systems.

In the USA there were relatively few positive remarks in the press, such as that of the *National Catholic Reporter*, which welcomed SRS as “the first encyclical of the twenty-first century”. And the columnist William Safire, writing in the *New York Times*, “viewed the Pope as trying to win favor with third world nations by use of ‘the rhetoric resentment’”. On the other hand, in the Southern parts of the world the consenting vote was clearly stronger. Archbishop Roger Mahony of Los Angeles said about SRS some months after its publication that it “will cause discomfort for those looking for simple affirmation of their own ideological preferences. It will confuse those

seeking to pin political labels on the Pope or Catholic Teaching”.

2. The situation of the encyclical in the year 1987

Political tension between East and West characterised 1987 – two years before the Eastern bloc imploded – and the years prior to it. In economic terms the oil crisis provoked high energy prices and the economy suffered overall in the world, especially in the Third World, where the higher prices could not be paid without real suffering. The international debt crisis was most intense in the poorest countries. Organised terrorism, at national and international levels, was aiming to disturb security and create uncertainty. As a result we can say: “the former optimism ha[d] [in the contemporary world] given way to pessimism”.

But the encyclical also mentions the “coexistence of positive aspects” (SRS, no. 26): the first positive note is the full awareness of the dignity of every human being. Secondly, there is a growing conviction of a radical interdependence which seeks for solidarity. Furthermore, the Pope also mentions a greater realisation of the limits of available resources and calls this the ecological concern (SRS 26). The awareness of problems is a sign of a new moral concern and gives this encyclical an optimistic note at the end.

In theological and magisterial terms, these years can be described in terms of a great debate: the theology of liberation provoked the Vatican, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued two documents about the topic in 1984 and 1986. SRS is “echoing the challenge of liberation theology”.

Despite the general background of debate, two particular events may have been particularly influential on the Pope. “According to the former Rome correspondent for the New York Times, Robert Suro, SRS had its origins in 1987 during the Pope’s trip to Chile. The solemn mass in the capital city of Santiago” attracted almost a million people. During the mass “anti-government protestors clashed with police in a riot that went on for the length of the service and injured hundreds of innocents”. Suro wrote: “When the long liturgy

ended at nightfall, John Paul seemed unwilling to leave. He repeatedly paused to stare at the violence unfolding before him even as aides tried to usher him off the altar.” The second event took place in Poland in the same year, when the Pope visited his country and saw the struggle of Solidarnosc and the upheaval in a Communist state.

3. A concentric setting up: corresponding contents of the titles and text

The encyclical has five chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. The core chapter is in the middle, chapter 4 (SRS 27-34), entitled “Authentic human development”, where the Pope concentrates his view on theology. He refers to the saving work of Christ and writes about the Church, with “her fundamental vocation of being a ‘sacrament’” and ends with a sentence from *Lumen Gentium*, describing her as “a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (SRS 31). In this remark about the Church with “her fundamental vocation of being a ‘sacrament’” we can see a deep theology which grounds social teaching.

The Pope rejects a materialistic concept of development, because it leads only to new problems. The goal should not be the accumulation of wealth but the sharing of our abundance. True development needs respect for the rights of persons and to demonstrate solidarity. In this context the Pope emphasises the difference between “having” and “being”, but stresses also that there is no need for a contradiction between “having” and “being”¹. And the Pope adds: “The evil does not consist in ‘having’ as such, but in possessing without regard for quality and the ordered hierarchy of the goods one has” (SRS 28).

The third and fifth chapters are related to each other. In the third chapter a survey of the contemporary world is given with a gloomy view. In the fifth chapter a theological application is given to this notion of development: “A theological reading of modern problems” (SRS 35-40).

In the third chapter the encyclical provides an analysis of the problems in the contemporary world. As already mentioned, the Pope describes the situation with gloomy words, but he also ends with a slightly optimistic view

when he sees the new awareness of human rights. In the corresponding chapter V, he stresses the moral character of development and that the slow movement of development is not only caused by economic factors but also by political and ideological ones. He rejects the notion of development characterised only by one or a few causes. In this chapter V the Pope introduces the idea of “structures of sin” and points out that there is a “difference between socio-political analysis and formal reference to ‘sin’ and the ‘structures of sin’” (SRS 36). In this moral point of view there is no place for a socio-political analysis.

The fruit of many sins leads to “structures of sin”. And for overcoming the “structures of sin” there is need for a change of behaviour – and this is called “conversion”. Again the Pope stresses the theological view and adds to this the necessity of solidarity, which is a virtue. At the end of chapter V he brings this idea of solidarity together with the holy Trinity, because “one God in three Persons, is what we Christians mean by the word ‘communion’” (SRS 40). John Paul II “sees solidarity as very closely linked to justice, for his definition of it echoes the definition that Thomas Aquinas gives of the virtue of justice, that is, justice as present in the agent or subject rather than as a set of norms or social institutions.”

Chapter II, entitled: “Originality of the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*”, (SRS 5-10), and chapter VI: “Some particular guidelines” (SRS 41-45) also correspond. In chapter II, John Paul describes the originality of the encyclical *Populorum progressio* and refers to its continuity with the doctrine of Vatican II. In Chapter VI the Pope gives some guidelines for solving the problems mentioned earlier. But the Pope also states that the “church has no technical solutions to offer” but has to defend human dignity and freedom. The personalistic view dominates this encyclical.

4. Continuity with the Documents of Vatican II and the Topicality of the “Signs of the Times”

In no. 3 of SRS the Pope mentions the “twofold dimension” of the social teaching of the Church: “on the one hand it is constant, for it remains identical in its fundamental inspiration” and he names three of these fundamental elements:

“reflection, judgment, action”. Above all there is a “vital link with the Gospel of the Lord”. “On the other hand, it is ever new” because there are “changes in historical conditions” and there is an “unceasing flow of events.”

The first dimension, the continuity, can be described in an easy way. In no. 6 of SRS a strong connection to Vatican II is made. The encyclical “is a kind of response to the Council’s appeal with which the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* begins: ‘The joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age ...’ And it is striking how often *Populorum progressio* appears in SRS – it is mentioned more than forty times. This is all the more striking when we look at the encyclical “*Laborem exercens*”, which was published 90 years after “*Rerum Novarum*”; in “*Laborem exercens*” there is no reference at all to the first social encyclical. Continuity is stressed more than usual in SRS.

In *Gaudium et Spes* and in *Populorum progressio* the “signs of the times” are mentioned and the “signs of the times” are quoted in SRS 7 (together with several other points): “to scrutinize the sign of times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel”. The French Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu, who was a *peritus* at the council, “affirms that the changing situations in which persons find themselves have become a theological source (*locus theologicus*) for a reading of the sign of times”. Do we have in this encyclical such a “theological source”, in the sense of “*locus theologicus*”?

This is not an easy question to answer. At least we can say that John Paul II is affirming historicity and is paying attention to the contemporary world. But a “*locus theologicus*” needs the unity of the three principles mentioned above: “reflection, judgment, action”. Concerning “action” the Pope has a very personalistic view and even the “structures of sin” are rooted in a single person and in single actions. We may consider that the “principle of action” in the world of 1987 should be more than individual or personal action – even if the person remains fundamental to action. “Social Action”, which is not mentioned, would have been a clearer signal of the “signs of the times”. But at the same time, we should admit that the Pope writes about nations which should act, and

these are collective actors. This might bring us at least a little bit of “social action”.

In general, we may come to the conclusion that the “signs of the times” are given – at least concerning the “principles of reflection and judging”. But the third principle, the “principle of acting”, is a category which the Pope only views in respect of single people. Chenu perhaps would have seen no “sign of the times” concerning the third principle.

But the presence of the first and second principles, reflection and judgment, may overwhelm the lacking third principle. Therefore I want to mention some aspects which might be indicative for the “signs of the times” – at least with respect to the first two principles. These aspects are: the endorsement of democracy; the re-affirmation of the natural law, on the one hand, and the role of theology on the other hand; the abandoning of moralising on the one hand (sentiment without analysis) and the strengthening of analysis on the other hand. In this context, we may say that for the first time the “secular” words “North” and “South” and political “blocs” are mentioned in the social teaching. They are not to be found in *Gaudium et Spes* and *Populorum progressio*, although the same conflicts were also present at those times.

Further aspects in favour of a “sign of the times” reading are the ecological considerations in SRS which are new to Catholic Social Teaching. Also striking is the appeal to the underdeveloped countries to look also to themselves and to take their own responsibility. The remaining and open question to some commentators is, how praying and acting are connected – or if there is any connection at all. For the concept of the “signs of the times” there should be a connection between praying and acting.

Michael Novak, who partly criticized this encyclical, will be put at the end of this review with a longer quotation: John Paul II “goes beyond Paul VI in five vital ways: in his emphasis on democracy as an essential condition for authentic development; in his emphasis on ‘the right of economic initiative’ as an essential condition both for meeting the common good and for respecting the creative subjectivity of the person; in his emphasis upon religious liberty, the deprivation of which, he says,

is a deprivation worse than material poverty. Fourth, his declaration that Catholic social teaching does not offer a ‘third way’ clarifies a long-standing misconception. [He stresses] freedom as the “fundamental category” and “first principle of action” for Catholic social teaching.”

5. Methodological Aspects

5. 1. Theology, philosophy and natural law

One of the first comments in Germany about SRS was to do with the “theologisation of catholic social teaching” in the encyclical (David A. Seeber, *Der theologische Kern von “Sollicitudo rei socialis”*, in: *Herder Korrespondenz*, Vol. 42, 1988, p. 160). Seeber is disappointed that the Pope assigned Catholic Social Teaching to theology, especially moral theology, and neglected the autonomy of natural law. Starting from the position of natural law, and therefore of philosophy, is a better way to communicate to the world than starting from Catholic theology. Because the social encyclicals, beginning with *Populorum progressio*, address “all people of good will” – not only catholic or Christian believers – the social encyclicals should use a broader base for communication than the language of Catholic theology. This was also the position of Oswald von Nell-Breuning, the Jesuit and great doyen of catholic social teaching in Germany. For him, universal natural law is a better basis on which to cooperate in the world, while Catholic theology is not a universal ground from which to speak to all people of good will in the world. One can say that the church has changed her approach across the history of the social encyclicals. In “*Rerum novarum*”, for instance, there is a “virtual absence of scriptural references and any invocation of the name of Christ” and this encyclical of 1891 relies “almost exclusively on natural law”.

But some authors also acknowledge that the plausibility of natural law is diminishing and is now more of an obstacle than help. In a discussion with the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, for instance, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger raised some questions regarding natural law. But in the polemic regarding SRS, it was not only the neglect of natural law which raised criticism but also the affirmation that social teaching is part of moral theology (SRS 41).

In Germany there are special chairs for “Social teaching” within the Catholic faculties of universities, in addition to those for moral theology. Some scholars were frightened about their independent future – so their criticisms were raised from an institutional standpoint. In summary we may say that in SRS the Pope replaces the idea of “social teaching” with “social theology”, a move which corresponds to Vatican II. In the literature one finds the comment that SRS “is the most explicitly ecclesiological of John Paul II’s social encyclicals”, and that it “is more theological than ethical”. This also fits with the notion of “the sacramental dimension of social action”.

5. 2. Catholic Social Teaching or Catholic Social Doctrine?

A doctrine is considered to have a high degree of authority and completeness. This was one reason for Marie-Dominique Chenu to dismiss the notion of “doctrine” regarding the social teaching of the church as mere ideology. The title of his book expresses this explicitly: “La ‘Doctrine Sociale’ de l’Eglise comme Idéologie” (Paris 1979). “While the term ‘doctrine’ had been used by earlier Popes in reference to their social teaching, this word did not appear either in John XXIII’s encyclical *Pacem in terris* (Peace on Earth) or in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council’s Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*.

Pope John Paul brings the term “doctrine” back in SRS, perhaps to remind us that the social teaching of the church forms a comprehensive doctrinal corpus. But he also shifts freely to the notion of “teaching”. It maybe that he did not want to take a position in this debate. SRS speaks in no. 1 of “an updated doctrinal corpus”, but also in no. 2 of a “large body of social teaching”. In no. 6 “social teaching” is mentioned, followed in no. 8 by “social doctrine”. We can state that the notion of “doctrine” is coming back, but that it has not substituted the notion of “teaching”. Once again we may see here a deep foundation in theology. A grounding in theology brings the word “doctrine” back into the vocabulary of the social teaching of the church.

5. 3. A question of terminology

5. 3. 1. Development not progress (*progressus* and *profectus*)

SRS is an encyclical about *development* in the world and commemorates the encyclical *Populorum “progressio”*. “Development” is the key notion of SRS, rather than “progress”. The idea of *progress* is linked to “philosophical connotations deriving from the Enlightenment” (SRS 27). But a “naïve mechanistic optimism has been replaced by a well founded anxiety for the fate of humanity.” (SRS 27). A footnote (50) explains this notion: “For this reason the word ‘development’ was used in the Encyclical rather than the word ‘progress’, but with an attempt to give the word ‘development’ its fullest meaning.” Only in the context of theology, and especially of soteriology, does the Pope speak of “progress”, as in no. 31: “The dream of ‘unlimited progress’ reappears, radically transformed by the new outlook created by Christian faith, assuring us that progress is possible only because God the Father has decided from the beginning to make man a sharer of his glory in Jesus Christ.”

I want to make some remarks on the Latin and English versions of the encyclical regarding this topic. It is striking that there is obviously no coherent notion between both language versions. In no 27, the English version uses the different terms “progress” and “development” where in the Latin version only uses the same word “progressionis”. On the other hand, the English version uses only the word “development” where the Latin version two words are used: “progressus” and “profectus”. (“Progressus” means development still in action and “profectus” means development which has reached its end.)

In nos. 18 and 19 of SRS, for example, the English word “development” is mentioned about 12 times. The Latin version uses the word “profectus” three times and the word “progressus” nine times. There is no consistent way to see how these words are used in a very specific sense. Only one notion is clear: in describing the contemporary world the church speaks about development, not progress. A last remark on this point: in no. 18 the word “progress” in the English version is

mentioned once – but only as a quotation from the encyclical “*Laborem exercens*”.

5. 3. 2. Solidarity

“Solidarity” is a key word in SRS. In the Latin version, however, this word is given through using different expressions. The Latin root of the word, “solidar”, is mentioned only one time, at the end of no. 44. It maybe that this word “solidar” is New Latin, and is therefore seldom used. The word “solidarity” in the English version has different Latin expressions: *consensio* (SRS 38 and 39), *concordia* (SRS 39) and *solida/firma hominum coniunctio* (SRS 40, 45). One point is striking. SRS mentions the motto of Pope Pius XII *Opus iustitiae pax*, peace as the fruit of justice, and continues: “Today one could say, with the same exactness and the same power of biblical inspiration (...): *Opus solidaritatis pax*, peace as the fruit of solidarity.” (SRS 39) In the German version there is an additional letter “e” and the term is “solidarietatis”. But in the Latin version of SRS we might think this Latin expression *Opus solidaritatis pax* would be used. But instead we find a different term: *Opus hominum coniunctionis pax* (SRS 39).

When we speak about the term solidarity in an encyclical which stresses also the personality of acting in society we might want to look for another term of social teaching, which is commonly used in the context of solidarity and personality: it is “subsidiarity”. But this word is not mentioned in SRS. This is another sign that this encyclical is rooted more in theology than in catholic social teaching.

5. 4. Combination of individualistic and holistic perspectives: A personalistic view of the human being

John Paul II has everywhere a theological point of view. He refers to sin and sin is a very personal moment. He looks first to the person and then to society – and society is rooted in persons who do not act by themselves. So the Pope has a certain affinity with the emphasis on personal agency in the sociology of Max Weber and the contemporary thinker Anthony Giddens. This model brings all acting back to single persons and is called “Methodological Individualism”, first used

by Joseph Schumpeter in 1904 (*Das Wesen und der Hauptinhalt der theoretischen Nationalökonomie*).

The critics of SRS often raise the point that structure is important for social acting, as this seems to be almost forgotten in this encyclical. These critics have mostly a different perspective – their primary focus is not a single person but a system or structure. In the social sciences this holistic standpoint is called systems theory (Talcott Parsons, Niklas Luhmann). The science of economics, however, uses methodological individualism.

Some people mix this methodological concept of science with political or liberal individualism. This is wrong, but some of the Pope’s critics have done so, as they accuse him of affirming capitalist culture. Because neoclassical economics is based on methodological individualism, and the Pope also refers to the single person, some critics put both on the same level. Mary Hobgood is one example of this mistake: “John Paul II showed his allegiance to the capitalist assumption that economic, political, and cultural social spheres function autonomously (SRS 15). When John Paul II located the origins of poverty in individual decisions, he effectively denied socioeconomic systems of social relations.” In stressing the view of a single person, which is the only moral subject, the Pope pays attention to the structure insofar as this structure is caused by single persons. Representatives of a holistic model (“structure”) see a gap in the system of “*personal action*” and a kind of reductionism, with a lack of recognition of emergent structures. Hobgood claims that a view which reduces all actions to those of single persons will use the (individualistic) notion of capitalist theory and is – because of that – supporting capitalism itself.

Two models compete in social sciences; both want to explain all action. One model refers to the individual sphere, the other to the system-sphere. You might say there is a micro-view and there is a macro-view. And if you take one of these views, the macro-view, you might well criticise the Pope’s encyclical more than if you took the micro-view. The problem is the link between both these views, micro and macro-levels. If you want to get a decision in society and to get all people involved in such a decision, one that concerns many social

goods, not only one good, we are talking about a democratic mode. But such a decision, which wants to unite the decisions of single persons into a holistic model of social well-being, is not possible. This micro-macro-link does not work for democratic decisions. It works only as an analytical instrument for aggregating the actions of single persons to see their results on a macro-level.

The Nobel-Prize winner in economics (1972), John Kenneth Arrow, analysed this structure in his impossibility-theorem where he proved that there is no possible micro-macro link in a democracy, that is, one where a complete system of social wellbeing is created for society and shared in by all people. (1951: Individual choice and social value). Amartya Sen also rejects the possibility of a democratic micro-macro link in his article (1970) “The impossibility of a paretian liberal”. And here he means that a liberal, democratic society cannot be combined with the model of Vilfredo Pareto, who stands for an optimum of wealth on the level of society.

If the social sciences cannot see any possible way of creating a micro-macro link concerning democratic decisions about social goods – how can we expect the Pope to do so? At the same time, we can say that John Paul II sees the human being not only in his individual sphere but also in his social sphere. The human being embraces both sides, the individual one and the social one. And therefore the Pope refers to a “person” – and person means in this context to combine both views (stressing “individual” responsibility [sin] and not forgetting “social” environment”).

Karol Wojtyła had studied the German philosopher Max Scheler and his notions of “Gesellschaft” (society), “Gemeinschaft” (community) and “Genossenschaft” (fellowship). Society means, in this context, the aggregation of individuals, while community is the common life of persons. Karol Wojtyła works with these concepts, seeing the human being with two dimensions. It is an old topic of social teaching, to try to get the right image of man. The German Dominican and scholar of social ethics, Eberhard Welty OP, was a contemporary of Max Scheler and studied for a short time at Cologne university where Max Scheler was teaching. Welty also analyses the

image of human being and human acting in his dissertation “Gemeinschaft und Einzelmensch” (1934, Community and the Single Person). This topic, and the question he raised, are still relevant for the debate in our times. What is the image of man (from the perspective of *social* ethics) and what kind of influence does “structure” have in this context?

Karol Wojtyła follows the line of integrating both in terms of theology and catholic social teaching: the personal action *and* the common good. He tries to give a united view of the human being. In his encyclical John Paul writes from the standpoint of moral theology and personal sin – therefore his view of society has to go into second place. The person remains in the first place. But by mentioning the common good Karol Wojtyła and John Paul II refer to a special kind of “structure”.

It is in this way that “structures” are introduced into his thought – not so much in his encyclical but more in his book of 1969 *The Acting Person*. “It is impossible to define the common good without simultaneously taking into account the subjective moment, that is, the moment of acting in relation to the acting person. (...) We can conceive of the common good as being the goal of acting only in that double – *subjective* and [italic original] *objective* – sense. (...) Our concern is therefore with the genuinely personalistic structure of human existence in a community.” (Karol Wojtyła, *Acting Person*, p. 338.) If he had included this image of man in his text, he would have avoided some criticism of his encyclical – but it is a philosophical view and not one of moral theology.

5. 5. Rejection of Systems: Criticism of Capitalism and Collectivism

The Pope is in favour of freedom for the human being and rejects systems which gain too much power over human beings. He criticizes East and West in this regard: “both concepts (are) imperfect and in need of radical correction.” Furthermore: “the Church's social doctrine adopts a critical attitude towards both liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism.” (SRS 21) And in the next chapter the Pope continues: “Each of the two blocs harbours in its own way a tendency towards imperialism, as it is

usually called, or towards forms of neo-colonialism" (SRS 22).

Because of these statements some critics attacked the Pope for making a "moral equivalence" between East and West. But the Pope was not making a moral statement here. He is just describing the behaviour of systems. It would have been better if this notion could have been expressed in the encyclical. The Pope stands beyond both systems, and the "social doctrine is not a 'third way'", but a "category of its own". (SRS 41). Because of this chapter some commentators suggest a shift to the left on the part of the Pope, while in other chapters, some see a shift to the right.

The Pope sees that both systems, capitalism and collectivism, have an internal logic – a logic which prevents people from acting freely. And freedom is necessary. Furthermore, this internal logic is reductionist in both systems, since all is reduced to the economic dimension. In both systems the human being is no longer a subject when systems gain power over him.

Archbishop Roger Mahony rejects the criticisms around this question, especially those raised in the United States, with the words: "It is not the Pope's role to serve as chaplain to the Western Alliance, a cheerleader for NATO or a referee for the superpowers".

6. "Structures of sin" and overcoming them: a central concern of the encyclical

John Paul II refers in his moral theological and personalistic approach to the single person. And only the single person can be a source of sin. On the other side he introduces the concept of "structural sin" (SRS 37). This is not a contradiction because the structure of sin does not exist by itself but is the "fruit of many sins which lead to the 'structure of sin'." The sin and the structure of sin can be overcome by a change of behaviour, called "conversion" (SRS 38). And this conversion will evoke solidarity.

With this concept John Paul achieves another perspective without giving up the personalistic view. But because of this personalistic foundation of "structure" he received some criticism that this structure is only a reduced one.

Nevertheless, the idea of a "structure of sin" became official and it might be intended to give an answer to liberation theology. In a special dialectic the Pope goes further and beyond the personalistic view at one point, when he mentions collective actors. In no. 37 the Pope writes: "not only individuals fall victim to this double attitude of sin [the all-consuming desire for profit, and the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one's will upon others,] nations and blocs can do so too. And this favours even more the introduction of the 'structure of sin'". In this passage one might get the weak idea of a "collective sin".

In an Instruction by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith dated August 6th 1984, it is written that structures, good or bad, "are the results of man's actions and so are consequences more than causes." The causes of structure are not the focus of this instruction and here one might see a rejection of liberation theology and the questions it asks about those causes. In SRS there is not such a clear distinction made between "causes" and "consequences" in this context.

7. The Encyclical and Liberation Theology

Liberation theology is mostly mentioned indirectly by quoting other magisterial documents. But the three principles from the beginning of the encyclical "seeing, judging, acting" might give a small hint to an acting church which is in favour of liberation theology. And the "option for the poor", an expression of the theology of liberation, is also mentioned: "the option or love of preference for the poor" (SRS 42). And in his conclusion, the Pope writes in the context of Latin America: "the aspiration to freedom from all forms of slavery affecting the individual and society is something noble and legitimate." (SRS 46). In relation to other papal and curial documents, this encyclical is echoing the challenge of liberation theology.

8. Mary, the Mother of God

In the very last chapter the Pope mentions Mary, the Mother of God. As he refers to the Bible, we may see in this more than just a pious word of conclusion. He quotes Mary from the Gospel of Luke, when she makes her famous prayer, the Magnificat: "he, (God) has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low

Studi/Contributions

degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (Lk 1:52-53). After this, the Pope concludes: „Her maternal concern extends to the personal and social aspects

of people's life on earth" (SRS 49). Between the lines one may perhaps see a positive evaluation of liberation theology – or, rather, not of “liberation theology” itself but of some of its aspects.

NOTE:

¹ For the notion of „having and being“ see Gabriel Marcel „Being and Having“ and Erich Fromm „To Have or to Be?“