

Ad Radices: Cicero at the Roots of Christian Social Teaching

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Many studies and documents have contributed to Christian social teaching across traditions in the past 150 years, yet there remains a lack of philosophical clarity as well as dialogue between traditions on social issues. Cicero's social philosophy had a profound but often forgotten impact on the development of Christian social thought: He coined the very terms *societas* and *humanitas* and developed the concept of *communitas*. We are indebted to him in the very language we employ to discuss social thought, yet we often lack the rich context and deeper meaning he provides. This research details the seeds in Cicero's social philosophy for the principles of Catholic social thought—the common good, human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity—and then traces Cicero's influence from the fourth to the fourteenth century, to show how Christian thinkers have incorporated his ideas. By learning about the unacknowledged sources of some of our presuppositions, we hope to retrieve vital resources common to all Christians, for developing Christian social thought, fostering collaboration between traditions, and promoting dialogue with non-Christians who address social issues.

Introduction¹

Christian social thought has generated numerous documents and studies in the past three decades. Within the Catholic intellectual tradition, after the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* came the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, as well as five encyclicals and many commentaries related to social teaching.² In the Orthodox tradition, there are the works of Ware, Zizioulas,

1 The author would like to thank my collaborator Dr. Matthew Mehan for his inspiration and insight, as well as several scholars who reviewed this article and offered valuable commentary, and the "Mere Christian Social Thought" conference attendees who asked clarifying questions. Guidance from Fr. Avelino González-Ferrer, Fr. Martin Schlag, Dr. Russell Hittinger, and two anonymous reviewers has been very helpful. I thank the late Dr. Ernest Ament for his research and resources. Any remaining errors are the full responsibility of the author alone.

2 In addition to the sources noted here since 1990, there were at least nine encyclicals in the previous hundred years, beginning in 1891 with Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of the Working Classes). For the items mentioned in the text: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000); *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004); the encyclicals: Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (God Is Love, 2005), and *Caritas in*

and Chrysavgis, among others.³ And in the various Protestant traditions, Ballor, Roberts, and Minich have made contributions.⁴ And yet, despite these advances, there is still a lack of philosophical exposition to clarify the sources and principles of Christian social thought.

We choose Cicero as the focus of this study, not only because his social philosophy can offer principles based in natural law and thus be accessible to Christians and non-Christians alike, but because he has had an outsized yet underappreciated impact on Christianity: For 1500 years, Christian scholars learning Latin would study Cicero because they found him edifying, whereas the Roman poets were corrupting.⁵ Cicero coined or developed many terms we take for granted, like *societas*, *humanitas*, and *communitas*; we often use his concepts without understanding their full philosophical context. His treatise *On Duties* was the first book after the Bible printed on the Gutenberg press and the first classical text printed south of the Alps, which signals the importance of Cicero's thought leading up to 1465 and implies some of his influence after.⁶ In the fourth century, the pagan philosophers could see that Cicero was so consonant with the Christian

Veritate (Charity in Truth, 2009); Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (Care for Our Common Home, 2015), *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship, 2020), and *Dilexit Nos* (He Loved Us, 2024). See also Russell Hittinger, *On the Dignity of Society: Catholic Social Teaching and Natural Law* (Catholic University of America Press, 2024); Gerard V. Bradley and E. Christian Brugger, *Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); J. Brian Benestad, *Church, State, and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Doctrine* (Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

3 Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, Classics Series, vol. 2 (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2018); John D. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*, ed. Fr. Gregory Edwards (Western American Diocese, Sebastian Press, 2008); Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *In the World, yet Not of the World: Social and Global Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, ed. John Chrysavgis (Fordham University Press, 2010). See also Hierotheos Vlachos, "Person in the Orthodox Tradition"; Dylan Pahman, "Orthodox Christian Social Thought and Asceticism" (PhD diss., St. Mary's University, London, 2025); Susan R. Holman, *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society* (Baker Academic, 2008); David Bentley Hart and John Chrysavgis, *For The Life of The World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2020); and P. A. H. Girma, *Orthodoxy and Social Justice* (independently published, 2025).

4 Jordan J. Ballor, "Modern Christian Social Thought," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 14, no. 2 (2011): 295–98; Alastair Roberts, Joseph Minich, Jake Meador, E. J. Hutchinson, Bradford Littlejohn, Glenn Moots, Marc Livecche, Onsi Aaron Kamel, Colin Redemer, and John Wyatt, *Protestant Social Teaching: An Introduction* (Davenant Press, 2022).

5 Tracy Lee Simmons, *Climbing Parnassus: A New Apologia for Greek and Latin* (ISI Books, 2002). Cicero fell from favor by the late nineteenth century, partly due to Nobel-prize winning German historian Theodor Mommsen deriding Cicero's republicanism and originality, and partly due to the Romantic movement against reason.

6 Dr. Ben Schneider, "Why Stoics?" https://www.stoics.com/why_stoics.html, retrieved June 2, 2025. In addition to inaugural editions from Gutenberg's colleagues in Mainz and from the press of Subiaco in Italy, there is also a copy from Cologne in 1465, showing that as the technology of the printing press spread to other cities, Cicero was an important author to be printed right away. In Cicero's own day, his fame came partly because he arose from a common background all the way through the political offices of Rome to become senator and then consul, all through the power of his voice and rhetoric. He was given the honorary title "Father of the Fatherland" for his role in uncovering the Catilinarian conspiracy.

faith that they began to reject him.⁷ What if they were right? What if Cicero's philosophy of social relations is so amenable to the Christian faith that it can provide principles for Christian social thought?

In this article we will trace in Cicero's works the precursors for the fundamental principles articulated in Catholic social thought in the past 150 years—the common good, human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity—both as a resource for Christian social teaching and as a fruitful bridge to non-Christian social thought. In general, historically “the Roman legal and social thought provided elements that could serve as fertile soil for the Christian Biblical seeds to grow and transform culture,”⁸ and the current research uncovers and clarifies how that is preeminently true of Cicero's thought in particular. We will then briefly trace the influence of Cicero's thought on the social philosophy in the Christian era during the first millennium of Christian political societies, the fourth through the fourteenth centuries; notably, during that era before the Protestant Reformation, all the sources we study are common to Christians. The philosophy of Cicero laid the groundwork for many of the Church Fathers who wrote in Latin.⁹ This research contributes in the following ways. First, by helping us learn more about one of the underappreciated sources of our presuppositions, it is a vital resource of concepts for developing contemporary social thought. Second, it can help inform debates in economics about the nature of the human person and of human society.¹⁰ Third, it highlights Cicero's contributions underlying Catholic social teaching (CST), and fourth, it can be a bridge in fostering dialogue across Christian traditions for the sake of mere Christian social thought, and between Christians and other people of goodwill who seek to address social issues.

7 Servais Pinckaers, OP, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, OP (Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 203. Cicero is also the only pagan cited in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, at no. 1956 on natural law.

8 Nadja El Beheiri, “Freedom, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity Through Work in Ancient Rome: The Tomb of the Baker Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces,” in *Rethinking Subsidiarity*, ed. Martin Schlag and Boglárka Koller (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 147.

9 Pinckaers, *Sources*, 203.

10 Because economics is not an architectonic science, it must take some of its first principles from other areas of inquiry, like philosophy or theology. For example, what is the nature of the human person? Why do human beings interact? How can human beings most fully flourish? These are questions economics cannot answer, and so it must take the answers from other fields; some economists acknowledge their first principles, others might simply assume them. One danger for a Christian economist is that unacknowledged assumptions may come from a philosophy at odds with their faith. The current research contributes an answer to some of these difficulties.

Cicero as a Source for the Four Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Common Good

The common good has been described in CST as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”¹¹ It is not “the simple sum of the particular goods of each person . . . [but] belonging to everyone and to each person, it is and remains ‘common,’ because it is indivisible and because only together is it possible to attain it. . . . The common good . . . [is] the good of all and of the whole person.”¹² Cicero develops the concept of the common good across three of his major philosophical works: *On the Republic*, *On the Laws*, and *On Duties*. In *On the Republic*, he holds that the highest use of virtue is the governing of the republic (*gubernatio civitatis*),¹³ and that “Nature has implanted in the human race so great a need of virtue and so great a desire to defend the common safety and welfare (*communem salutem*) that the strength thereof has conquered all allurements of pleasure and ease.”¹⁴ Cicero alludes to his own service as consul when he says that he “could not hesitate to expose [himself] to the severest storms . . . for the sake of the preservation of the republic (*conservandorum civium causa*), and to secure, at the cost of [his] own personal danger, a quiet life for all the rest (*commune reliquis otium*).”¹⁵ In his initial definition of a republic, he refers to *res populi*, not a simple collection of people but “an assemblage of a people in large numbers associated in agreement with respect to justice and a partnership for the common good (*utilitatis communione*),”¹⁶ where the partnership is not a mere consent as in a contract but a shared position, a “common agreement in a shared endeavor.”¹⁷

11 *Compendium*, no. 164.

12 *Compendium*, nos. 164–65.

13 *On the Republic* [*De Re Publica*], Loeb Edition, trans. Clinton W. Keyes (Harvard University Press, 1928 [hereafter, *Rep.*]), I.2.

14 *Rep.* I.1. Translation by Keyes and current author.

15 *Rep.* I.7. Translation by Keyes and Ian Flanders: Keyes has instead “safety of [his] fellow citizens” for *conservandum civium causa*. Here the “quiet life” is not one of laziness and excess, nor of Epicurean quietism, but one of peace and fruitful leisure. I thank Ian Flanders for this clarification.

16 *Rep.* I.39. Augustine engaged and critiqued Cicero, in his own description of a people in *The City of God*, bk. 19.

17 Jed Atkins, *Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason: The Republic and Laws* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 151. Also, *res* means not only (nor primarily) physical property, but is used metaphorically to mean “interests and affairs of the people,” 131. See Malcolm Schofield, *Saving the City: Philosopher Kings and Other Classical Paradigms* (Routledge, 1999), 187–89, as well as Elizabeth Asmis, “The State as a Partnership: Cicero’s Definition of *Res Publica* in His Work *On the State*,” *History of Political Thought* 25 (2004): 579.

Through Scipio, the primary speaker and main authority in *On the Republic*, Cicero envisions the political society as a type of partnership in justice,¹⁸ and the first cause of men's coming together is to promote "that partnership (*societas*) of citizens living a happy and honorable life."¹⁹ How is this partnership achieved? Following Aristotle, Cicero describes a blending of three forms of government (monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy),²⁰ where there is a balance and a harmony: As a vestige of the monarchy, the magistrates have enough power (*potestas*) to fulfill their functions; as a vestige of the aristocracy, the counsels and legislative process (*consilium*) of the senators have enough influence and authority; and as a vestige of democracy, the people have enough rights and *libertas*.²¹ The framers of the US Constitution drew directly from Cicero in establishing the representative democracy in their republic, with the president, the senators, and the voting rights of the people.²² For Cicero, it is through a harmony (*concordia*) of the three parts that a republic is safe from devolution to the three corresponding deformities—monarchy devolving into despotism, aristocracy devolving into oligarchy, or democracy devolving into mob-rule or anarchy²³—and safe from revolution.

How can the common good be balanced with personal liberty? What happens when there is a conflict? Cicero shows that any conflict between the common good and an individual good is only an apparent conflict, because the good of the republic encompasses the true good of the individual. He claims that Socrates was correct when he "often cursed the man who first separated the expedient (*utilitas*) from justice; for this separation, he complained, is the chief source of

18 *Rep.* III.45.

19 *Rep.* IV.3. See E. M. Atkins, "Cicero" in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. C. Rowe and M. Schofield (Cambridge University Press, 2013), for translation, combined with Keyes.

20 *Rep.* I.69. Cicero is likely drawing from Aristotle's "mixed regime," which combines aspects of all three forms of government. See Aristotle, *Politics*, esp. bks. 4–6.

21 *Rep.* II.57.

22 See Jack Ferguson, "The Ciceronian Origins of American Law and Constitutionalism," SSRN Scholarly Paper 4892494, Social Science Research Network, July 12, 2024, <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4892494>; and Mortimer N. S. Sellers, "The Influence of Marcus Tullius Cicero on Modern Legal and Political Ideas," presented at Colloquium Tullianum, 2008, https://scholarworks.law.ubalt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2156&context=all_fac.

23 *Rep.* I.69.

the destruction of all.”²⁴ Separating the individual good from the common good, not seeing how they are in truth the same, is deadly to the individual and to the political body.

For, if we are so disposed that each, to gain some personal profit, will defraud or injure his neighbour, then those bonds of human society, which are most in accord with Nature’s laws, must of necessity be broken. Suppose, by way of comparison, that each one of our bodily members should conceive this idea and imagine that it could be strong and well if it should draw off to itself the health and strength of its neighboring member, the whole body would necessarily be enfeebled and die; so, if each one of us should seize upon the property of his neighbours and take from each whatever he could appropriate to his own use, the bonds of human society must inevitably be annihilated. For, without any conflict with Nature’s laws, it is granted that everybody may prefer to secure for himself rather than for his neighbour what is essential for the conduct of life; but Nature’s laws do forbid us to increase our means, wealth, and resources by despoiling others.²⁵

Here Cicero points to the role of natural law in preserving the political body. He continues, “This, then, ought to be the chief end of all men, to make the interest of each individual and of the whole body politic identical. For, if the individual appropriates to selfish ends what should be devoted to the common good, all human fellowship will be destroyed.”²⁶ Leaders of the republic must serve the good of all, not of certain factions. Leaders must “take care for the welfare of the whole body politic and not in serving the interests of some one party to betray the rest.”²⁷ Leaders must not “exploit the *res publica* for selfish profit [as this] is not only immoral; it is criminal [*sceleratum*], unspeakably evil [*nefarium*].”²⁸

24 *On the Laws* [*De Legibus*], Loeb Edition, trans. Clinton Keyes (Harvard University Press, 1928 [hereafter, *Leg.*]), I.33–34. Translation by Keyes and current author.

25 *On Duties* [*De Officiis*], Loeb Edition, trans. Walter Miller (Harvard University Press, 1913 [hereafter, *De Off.*]), III.21–22. The affinity with St. Paul’s analogy of the body of Christ and the members can be seen in this passage. See 1 Cor. 12:12–31.

26 *De Off.* III.26.

27 *De Off.* I.85.

28 *De Off.* II.77.

In his *On Duties* [*De Officiis*], Cicero's last and most mature philosophical work, he portrays the noble or honorable good (*honestum*) in book 1, the expedient or useful good (*utile*) in book 2, and then the harmony of the two in book 3, showing that everything truly *honestum* is expedient, and that anything which appears to be expedient but is not honorable, is also not truly expedient. This work is a foundational text for Western political and social thought. In book 1, Cicero lays out the groundwork for the four cardinal virtues, which Ambrose, Augustine, and Aquinas all followed in developing their moral frameworks. In discussing justice, Cicero shows how it deals with "the conservation of organized society, with rendering to every man his due, and with the faithful discharge of obligations assumed."²⁹ Justice is the virtue most extensive in its application and is the principle by which society (*societas*) and the common bonds between men (*vitae quasi communitas*) are maintained.³⁰ If people seek what is useful but not noble, they "overturn the fundamental principles established by nature, when they divorce the expedient from the just or honorable."³¹

Justice involves good faith, "truth and fidelity to promises and agreements."³² Cicero holds that the duties we have related to this social virtue of justice take precedence over the duties we have related to the virtues of wisdom, fortitude, and temperance, because justice relates to the common good of the republic.³³ The degree to which something fosters the common good, then, is the criterion by which Cicero judges all actions; the common good is the *telos* and the directing principle of all the virtues.

We have a responsibility to serve the common good; Cicero is very critical of those who withdraw from public life: They are "traitors to social life, for they contribute to it none of their interest, none of their effort, none of their means."³⁴ And those that do serve in public life must be devoted to the common good of the republic, more so than even to their own life. Cicero is remembered as one of the greatest rhetoricians in history, yet he shows that all rhetoric is to be ordered to

²⁹ *De Off.* I.15.

³⁰ *De Off.* I.20.

³¹ *De Off.* III.101.

³² *De Off.* I.23.

³³ *De Off.* I.153, 155, 159.

³⁴ *De Off.* I.29.

the common good.³⁵ He also concludes that “it is our duty to respect, defend, and maintain the common bonds of union and fellowship subsisting between all the members of the human race (*commune totius generis hominum conciliationem et consociationem*).”³⁶ The duties of justice relate to the “welfare of our fellow men, and nothing ought to be more sacred . . . than that.”³⁷

What if there appears to be a conflict between the individual good and the common good? Because “our native land embraces all of our loves,”³⁸ the common good embraces our individual goods, not in a Marxist way that destroys all the individual and intermediate goods, but in an organic, social way that includes and preserves all the intermediate goods, as we shall see below with human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity.

(Toward a Concept of) Human Dignity

As with many concepts, Cicero plants seeds for the concept of human dignity. *Dignitas* in his time meant the role someone played or the status someone had in society, based on virtue and merit.³⁹ The concept was later transformed by the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church in terms of the image of God,⁴⁰ but there are strong hints of our conception of human dignity in Cicero’s own writings. He grounds the source of dignity in the nature of human beings. All human beings have reason in common, and law is “the highest reason implanted by Nature in man, which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite.”⁴¹ Cicero seems to recognize the nature of conscience, centuries before Christians further developed the concept.⁴² All human beings have this natural sense of law

35 *De Oratore* 1.34 and *De Inventione* 1.1, 3–5.

36 *De Off.* 1.149. The notion of a “consociation” has been used in politics and religion, but it could be developed further, to describe a group with a closer connection than a mere “association.”

37 *De Off.* 1.155.

38 *De Off.* 1.57. Cicero writes “omnes omnium caritates patria una complexa est,” which sounds similar to expressions for the common good in CST.

39 *De Inv.* II.53; cited in El Beheiri, “Freedom, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity,” 131. See also Paul MacKendrick, *The Philosophical Books of Cicero* (Duckworth, 1989), 18–19.

40 El Beheiri, “Freedom, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity,” 131. See also *Compendium*, nos. 105–151; e.g., “*The Church sees in men and women, in every person, the living image of God himself. This image finds, and must always find anew, an ever deeper and fuller unfolding of itself in the mystery of Christ, the Perfect Image of God, the One who reveals God to man and man to himself*” (emphasis in original).

41 *Leg.* I.18.

42 These aspects of “conscience” that Cicero speaks of are likely the natural habit of the human soul to know the first principles of practical reason (e.g., to do good and to avoid evil). And this natural habit Aquinas calls *synderesis*. It cannot err in knowing the first principles, but conscience can certainly err in applying those principles to particular circumstances and can also simply be

in common, and “those who share Law must also share Justice, and those who share these are regarded as members of the same *civitas*.”⁴³ Cicero thus argues from the human ability to reason to a universal brotherhood of all human beings, beyond the confines of a given city or empire.

Not only do all human beings share in reason, but they also share reason with God: “Since there is nothing better than reason, and since it exists both in man and God, the first common possession of man and God is reason.”⁴⁴ Thus, we should conceive “this whole universe as one commonwealth (*una civitas communis*) of which both gods and men are members.”⁴⁵ We share with the gods to some degree in our nature, but there are those who protect the Republic who share even more gloriously with the gods through their actions. Cicero claims that those who have served the Republic well should be deemed descendants of the gods and endowed with godlike qualities.⁴⁶ In the *Dream of Scipio*, a portion of book 6 of *On the Republic* which survived throughout the centuries when the rest of the work was lost, Cicero has Scipio Africanus the Elder, the grandfather of Scipio the Younger, appear from the heavens to tell his grandson, “All those who have preserved, aided, or enlarged their fatherland have a special place prepared for them in the heavens, where they may enjoy an eternal life of happiness. For nothing of all that is done on earth is more pleasing to that Supreme God who rules the whole universe than the assemblies and gatherings of men associated in justice (*concilia coetusque hominum iure sociati*), which are called *civitates*. Their rulers and conservers (*rectores et conservatores*) come from that place, and to that place they return.”⁴⁷ Scipio is beholding the stars in heaven, and his grandfather shows him that those who serve the Republic have a place in the heavens, like the stars. This exalted view of the dignity and the destiny of human beings is somewhat rare in the classical world, yet it accords to some degree with the Christian vision of eternal destiny.

ignored. But it cannot be fully extinguished. See *Summa Theologica* 1.79, aa. 12 and 13; and *Disputed Questions on Truth*, qq. 16 and 17. So the sense of conscience Cicero points to is different from the supernatural gift of faith or a conscience enlightened by grace.

43 *Leg.* I.23.

44 *Leg.* I.23.

45 *Leg.* I.23.

46 *Rep.* II.4.

47 *Rep.* VI.13.

Finally, to show that Cicero honors not only the highest roles in the Republic, he also explains that justice must be done even toward the humblest. “Now the humblest station and the poorest fortune are those of slaves; and they give us no bad rule who bid us treat our slaves as we should our employees: they must be required to work; they must be given their dues.”⁴⁸ All human beings are united insofar as they all possess reason, and so from the highest to the lowest, all have dignity and deserve justice. In discussing moral propriety, Cicero claims that we should “in our dealings with people show what I may almost call reverence toward all men—not only toward the men who are of the highest standing, but toward others as well.”⁴⁹ It is through Cicero that we have the word *humanitas*, and we have seen how he planted the seeds for that concept which was further developed in the Christian era.

Related to the concept of human dignity is Cicero’s treatment of the importance of individual temperaments; some writers have begun to develop a doctrine of individualism from Cicero’s works.⁵⁰ Although not emphasized in many of the commentaries of the Middle Ages, the doctrine found fertile ground for development in the Renaissance. In addition to the common human nature we have based on our endowment of reason, Cicero holds that we also have a second character, based on physical and personality differences and our own particular gifts.⁵¹

Everybody must resolutely hold fast to his own particular gifts, in so far as they are particular only and not vicious, in order that propriety [*decorum*] . . . may be more easily secured. For we must so act as not to oppose the universal laws of human nature, but, while safeguarding those, to follow the bent of our own particular nature; and even if other careers should be better and nobler, we may still

48 *De Off.* I.41.

49 *De Off.* I.99. Translation by Miller and Flanders; for “of highest standing,” Miller has “best.”

50 N. E. Nelson, “Cicero’s *De Officiis* in Christian Thought 300–1300,” in *Essays and Studies in English and Comparative Literature*, University of Michigan Publications in Language and Literature, 10 (Ann Arbor, MI, 1933), 159. Though Cicero’s account of individualism was not emphasized during the early Middle Ages, it plays a role in the *Moralium Dogma* (twelfth century) and was transmitted to Italy through Brunetto Latini in the thirteenth century. It became “a keystone in an ethical treatise . . . by the Florentine Bartolomeo da San Concordia, [which] was translated into Italian just a few years before the birth of Petrarch, in whose personality and writings the doctrine of individualism found its great modern exemplar.”

51 *De Off.* I.107.

regulate our own pursuits by the standard of our own nature. . . . Nothing is proper that “goes against the grain,” . . . that is, if it is in direct opposition to one’s natural genius.⁵²

Cicero recognizes the importance of individual characteristics: “Everyone, therefore, should make a proper estimate of his own natural ability and show himself a critical judge of his own merits and defects.”⁵³ Through his use of the word *magnanimitas*, Cicero emphasizes the importance of the sense of worth of one’s own personality.⁵⁴ This recognition further develops Cicero’s concept of *humanitas*, which has a threefold connotation: It relates to man (to whom nothing human is alien), to culture, and to benevolence.⁵⁵

Following the guidance of the oracle at Delphi—“to know thyself”—Cicero claims that

he who knows himself will realize, in the first place, that he has a divine element within him, and will think of his own inner nature as a kind of consecrated image of God; and so he will always act and think in a way worthy of so great a gift of the gods. . . . For when the mind, having attained to a knowledge and perception of the virtues, has abandoned its subservience to the body and its indulgence of it, has put down pleasure as if it were a taint of dishonour, has escaped from all fear of death or pain, has entered into a partnership of love with its own, recognizing as its own all who are joined to it by Nature; when it has taken up the worship of the gods and pure religion, has sharpened the vision of the eye and of the mind so that they can choose the good and reject the opposite—a virtue which is called prudence because it foresees—then what greater degree of happiness can be described or imagined? . . . And when it almost lays hold of the ruler and governor of the universe, and when it realizes that it is not shut in by [narrow] walls as a resident of some fixed spot, but is a citizen of the whole universe, as it were of a single city—then

⁵² *De Off.* I.110.

⁵³ *De Off.* I.115.

⁵⁴ MacKendrick, *Philosophical Books*, 6.

⁵⁵ MacKendrick, *Philosophical Books*, 19. In the Renaissance, Castiglione’s *Courtier* (1528) is an ideal form.

in the midst of this universal grandeur, and with such a view and comprehension of nature, ye immortal gods, how well it will know itself . . . !⁵⁶

Although Cicero's understanding of God was different from the Christian God, his portrayal of the human being as *imago Dei* and as having a divine spark within does resonate analogously with the Christian understanding of the human person in relation to God.

Solidarity

Solidarity is not a “feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a *firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*. That is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible *for all*.”⁵⁷ Based on the universal nature of human beings, Cicero derives our moral duties to others. The first cause of human beings uniting in community was not out of weakness, but out of a “certain social spirit which nature has implanted in man.”⁵⁸ Developing ideas from Plato and the Stoics, Cicero holds that “men are born for the sake of men, that they may be able mutually to help one another; in this direction we ought to follow Nature as our guide, to contribute to the common good by an interchange of acts of kindness, by giving and receiving, and thus by our skill, our industry, and our talents to cement human society more closely together, man to man.”⁵⁹ In this single passage, Cicero shows at least three things: the purpose of human life, how the sense of solidarity or mutual aid is ordered to the common good, and how commercial relations help to build the bonds of society. He later states that “a strong bond of fellowship (*communitas*) is effected by mutual interchange of kind services; and as long as these kindnesses are mutual and acceptable, those between whom they are interchanged are united

⁵⁶ *De Leg.* I.59-61.

⁵⁷ *Compendium*, no. 193, citing John Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), no. 38 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁸ *Rep.* I.39.

⁵⁹ *De Off.* I.22. Gloria Vivenza has detailed the rich and vast commentary tradition on this passage alone. See “Renaissance Cicero. The ‘Economic’ Virtues of *De Officiis* I, 22 in Some Sixteenth Century Commentaries,” *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 11, no. 4 (December 2004): 507–23.

by the ties of an enduring intimacy.”⁶⁰ Rarely in ancient philosophers do we find such a positive observation about the deep, wholesome, social benefits of commerce.

Justice is the most important of the cardinal virtues for Cicero.⁶¹ He explains how justice is indispensable for the conduct of business, to all “buyers and sellers, to employers and employed, and to those who are engaged in commercial dealings generally.”⁶² The first principle of justice is to refrain from harming others, and the second principle is to preserve the common good.⁶³ In this second principle, justice is closely related to solidarity insofar as it is ordered to the common good: Justice undergirds Cicero’s treatment of the moral duties (*officia*) people have for others. As opposed to some modern conceptions of duty as static or mono-directional, these duties for Cicero are fuller and more dynamic: They are “mutual reciprocal relationships.”⁶⁴ These are not the duties of the rare Stoic sage but of the average person, embedded in various relationships, “with a great many degrees of closeness or remoteness in human society.”⁶⁵ As if describing concentric circles proceeding outward, Cicero states that “the first bond of union is that between husband and wife; the next, that between parents and children; then we find one home, with everything in common. And this is the foundation of civil government, the nursery, as it were, of the state (*seminarium rei publicae*).”⁶⁶ The next layer out is the bond of kindred, first and second cousins and those related by marriage: “the bonds of common blood hold men fast through good-will and affection; for it means much to share in common the same family traditions, the same forms of domestic worship, and the same ancestral tombs.”⁶⁷ In the next layer out come fellow citizens of the same place, followed by those connected by the same language, and finally the universal bond of our common humanity.⁶⁸ Cicero offers a hierarchy of duties: Our mutual

60 *De Off.* I.56.

61 *De Off.* III.28 and I.158.

62 *De Off.* II.40.

63 *De Off.* I.31 and I.20.

64 Matthias Gelzer, *The Roman Nobility*, trans. Robin Seager (Basil Blackwell, 1969), 66. Cited in *Cicero: De Officiis / On Duties*, trans. Harry Edinger (Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), ix.

65 *De Off.* I.53.

66 *De Off.* I.54.

67 *De Off.* I.54–55.

68 *De Off.* I.53.

reciprocal relationships in the first bond of husband and wife take precedent, and then children, then kin, and then fellow citizens. But he elevates our duty to our country as high as our duty to our parents: In the hierarchy of which duties are most important, “where most of our moral obligation is due, country would come first, and parents, for their services have laid us under the heaviest obligation.”⁶⁹

Finally, Cicero extends our mutual reciprocal relationships even beyond our fellow citizens: “Others again who say that regard should be had for the rights of fellow-citizens, but not of foreigners, would destroy the universal brotherhood of mankind (*communem humani generis societatem*); and when this is annihilated, kindness, generosity, goodness, and justice must utterly perish; and those who work all this destruction must be considered as wickedly rebelling against the immortal gods. For they uproot the fellowship which the gods have established between human beings. . . . For [justice] is the sovereign mistress and queen of all the virtues.”⁷⁰ Many writers in the following centuries have found the sources for international law and universal human rights in Cicero’s writings.⁷¹

As a further example of how solidarity is related to the common good, and just how close a tie Cicero envisions in his description of the bonds of society, he uses the term *coniunctio* several times to describe the close connection between human beings as citizens. We noted earlier the high esteem Cicero has for the marital union (*coniugio*) as the first bond of human society, and the related term *coniunctio* can mean “agreement” or “connection,” but in the *De Officiis* it has a deeper connotation. Twice he uses the phrase “the interest of society and the cohesion of the relationships of man to man” (*societas hominum coniunctioque*),⁷² once in describing the goal of justice and once in describing the benefit that will occur if people follow the guidance of showing kindness to others in proportion to the closeness of their relationship. These bonds of social unity which nature has forged between men reveal a deep unity, which guides people to act for the common good.⁷³ Cicero claims that the whole purpose of law is to protect the bonds of union between citizens (*civium coniunctionem*).⁷⁴

⁶⁹ *De Off.* I.58. See also I.32.

⁷⁰ *De Off.* III.28.

⁷¹ See section below on Cicero’s influence through the centuries.

⁷² *De Off.* I.17 and I.50, interweaving the translations of Miller and Walsh.

⁷³ See *De Off.* III.52–53.

⁷⁴ *De Off.* III.23.

This solidarity between citizens also applies to the harmony between different groups or orders within society: because harmony between the orders (*ordinum coniunctio*) is essential to the health and welfare of the republic.⁷⁵ And this understanding of the harmony between different groups leads us to the final principle, subsidiarity.

Subsidiarity

El Beheiri has shown that “principles of subsidiarity and solidarity were present implicitly”⁷⁶ in Roman society, and we have seen already a few significant hints of subsidiarity in Cicero’s works: (1) the blending of the *ordos* in the threefold structure in government—the magistrates, the senators, and the people—to provide a balanced harmony;⁷⁷ (2) the importance of the individual in growing in virtue and *humanitas* to promote a just and civil society;⁷⁸ and (3) the concentric circles of responsibility, which imply that we need to take care of those closest to us first.

Just as solidarity and justice are ordered to serve the common good, so too subsidiarity is a principle which is ordered to the common good.⁷⁹ The principle of subsidiarity has been described as follows: “A community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.”⁸⁰ We find the seeds of the principle of subsidiarity in Cicero’s writings: In discussing how generosity must be moderated by justice, he says that “we must, in the first place, see to it that our act of kindness shall not prove an injury either to the object of our beneficence or to others. . . . For

⁷⁵ *De Off.* III.88.

⁷⁶ El Beheiri, “Freedom, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity,” 146.

⁷⁷ *De Rep.* II.57; see also Cicero’s *Pro Sestio*, 137.

⁷⁸ On the key connection between *humanitas* and *doctrina* (moral law), see T. N. Mitchell, “Cicero on the Moral Crisis of the Late Republic,” *Hermathena*, 136 (1984): 21–41. I thank Fr. Avelino González-Ferrer for these insights: Appropriate formation at the individual level—self-mastery and decision-making—ensures the development of the whole. Through *humanitas* and *doctrina*, civilization can endure.

⁷⁹ See Pierpaolo Donati, “What Does ‘Subsidiarity’ Mean? The Relational Perspective,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 12, no. 2 (2009): 211–44.

⁸⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1883, citing Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991), no. 48. See also Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), no. 79: “Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.”

those who confer a harmful favour upon someone whom they seemingly wish to help are to be accounted not generous to another but dangerous sycophants.”⁸¹ Cicero agrees with Philip of Macedon’s upbraiding of his son Alexander (later, “the Great”), after Alexander had given lavish amounts of money to try to secure the goodwill of the Macedonians: “What in the mischief induced you to entertain such a hope,” Philip said to Alexander, “as that those men would be loyal subjects to you whom you had corrupted with money?” Cicero comments that the recipient of such funds goes “from bad to worse and is made all the more ready to be constantly looking” for one gift after another.⁸² Cicero cites the Roman proverb “Bounty has no bottom” to show that excessive generosity leads to limitless expectations on the part of recipients, “when those who have been accustomed to receive gifts claim what they have been in the habit of getting, and those who have not, wish for the same bounty.”⁸³ We might note how habitual recipients often feel entitled. In commenting on these passages, St. Ambrose of Milan later noted that free gifts discourage self-reliance.⁸⁴

In addition to hints of subsidiarity in the context of the personal virtue of generosity, Cicero also shows its importance in those who administer the Republic. “The expenditure of money is better justified when it is made for walls, docks, harbours, aqueducts, and all those works which are of service to the community.”⁸⁵ In offering guidance for how to help the worthy poor, Cicero states that “we ought to use judgment and discretion. . . . For, as Ennius says so admirably, ‘Good deeds misplaced, me thinks, are evil deeds.’”⁸⁶ In light of the principle of subsidiarity, trying to help someone might actually harm them, if it violates their own ability to fulfill their duties. Services that touch the whole body politic must protect the interests of individuals and also “be beneficial, or at least not prejudicial, to the republic, . . . a blessing both to the citizens and to

⁸¹ *De Off.* I.42.

⁸² *De Off.* II.53.

⁸³ *De Off.* II.55.

⁸⁴ *De Off. Ministr.* III, 19, col. 150, cited in Nelson, “Cicero’s *De Officiis*,” 70.

⁸⁵ *De Off.* II.60.

⁸⁶ *De Off.* II.62.

the republic.”⁸⁷ Cicero holds that policies favoring equal distribution of property “deserve unqualified condemnation . . . [for] what more ruinous policy than that could be conceived?”⁸⁸ Cicero also has strong words for demagogues:

They who pose as friends of the people, and who for that reason either attempt to have agrarian laws passed, in order that the occupants may be driven out of their homes, or propose that money loaned should be remitted to the borrowers, are undermining the foundations of the commonwealth: first of all, they are destroying harmony [*concordia*], which cannot exist when money is taken away from one party and bestowed upon another; and second, they do away with equity, which is utterly subverted, if the rights of property are not respected. For . . . it is a distinctive function of the republic and of the city to guarantee to every man the free and undisturbed control of his own particular property.⁸⁹

The higher order of the state should not interfere in the lower order of the citizen, by taking away his property to give to another.⁹⁰

Cicero into the Christian Arena

We have seen some of the interrelationships among the principles of Catholic social teaching, how human dignity leads to solidarity and requires subsidiarity for it to flourish and develop. The common good also flows out of the social nature of the human person and human society, and ensures the flourishing of the human person. Based on our treatment above, it can be easier to see how “receiving the life and teaching of Christ brought out the best in ancient Roman culture and activated the principles that were present potentially and as nucleus in pre-Christian time.”⁹¹ Although Cicero’s direct influence on Renaissance, Reformation-era, and modern thinkers has been documented (Petrarch, Thomas

87 *De Off.* II.72.

88 *De Off.* II.73. Cicero explains his reasoning: “For the chief purpose in the establishment of the republic and of cities was that individual property rights might be secured. For, although it was by Nature’s guidance that men were drawn together into communities, it was in the hope of safeguarding their possessions that they sought the protection of cities.”

89 *De Off.* II. 78.

90 Cicero’s vision of a *concordia ordinum* offers fruitful resources against many of the errors of Marxism. It can be helpful to have a nonreligious social philosophy to argue against Marxism, especially when some authors cite Christianity *in favor of* Marxism. See also *De Off.* I.144–45 for harmony; the analogy from personal order to societal order.

91 El Behieri, “Freedom, Solidarity, and Subsidiarity,” 147.

More, Erasmus, Melancthon, Calvin, Grotius, Pufendorf, Justus Lipsius, and more),⁹² what is less often treated in scholarly discourse is how Cicero influenced pre-Renaissance writers. We will trace some of those influences, from the fourth century to the fourteenth century, because through many of these thinkers, Cicero also indirectly influenced the Renaissance and modern eras. More importantly, the thinkers highlighted in the following sections represent a common resource for Christians, from before the Protestant separations.

Church Fathers

Lactantius, an advisor to Emperor Constantine, incorporated Cicero's understanding of justice.⁹³ Augustine tells us that it was Cicero's dialogue *Hortensius* which inspired him to take up philosophy, which then eventually led him to Christianity. It would be difficult to imagine what Christian theology would have become in the West if Augustine had not become Christian.⁹⁴ Augustine incorporated various aspects of Cicero's natural law, as well as many of his arguments against pagan deities, into his great work *The City of God*. Augustine's mentor Ambrose of Milan was the city administrator before he was nominated bishop by popular acclaim. Ambrose then relied heavily on Cicero's *On Duties* to structure and write his own *On the Duties of the Ministers*, as a guide to pastors and other church leaders on how to navigate ethically the practical challenges of church administration.⁹⁵ Jerome was so taken by Cicero that he was chided by Jesus in a vision because he was more Ciceronian than Christian.⁹⁶ And because so many Christian leaders in the sixth century were reading and emulating Cicero, Pope Gregory the Great felt it necessary to de-emphasize Cicero so that people would refocus on the Scriptures. Cicero clearly had an impact on the thinking and writing of the four great Latin Fathers and

92 MacKendrick, *Philosophical Books*, 238–315. Vivenza has analyzed the tradition of commentaries on Cicero's *De Officiis*. For example, for five centuries at the University of Padua, anyone who would acquire a chair in the arts faculty needed to write his own commentary on Cicero's *De Officiis*. And the English schools of the seventeenth century regularly used *De Officiis* as their ethics textbook.

93 *Divinae Institutiones*, I, 15, p. 58, cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 64. See also Thomas Hughson, "Social Justice in Lactantius's Divine Institutes: An Exploration," in Johan Leemans, Brian J. Matz, and Johan Verstraeten, *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for Twenty-First-Century Christian Social Thought* (Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 185–205.

94 Karla Pollmann and Willemien Otten, *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2013).

95 See Ivor J. Davidson, "A Tale of Two Approaches: Ambrose, *De Officiis* 1.1–22 and Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.1–6," *Journal of Theological Studies* (Oxford) 52, no. 1 (2001): 61–83.

96 Jerome, *Letter 22 to Eustochium*, 30, in Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ser. 2, vol. 6. *Jerome: The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, trans. W. H. Freemantle (Christian Classics Ethereal Library).

on many other Christian leaders of their time. [Figure 1](#) traces the influence of Cicero's writings through many thinkers from the fourth to the fourteenth century.

Early Middle Ages

Archbishop Martin of Bracara wrote his *Formula of a Noble Life (On the Four Virtues)* in the sixth century and echoed many of Cicero's themes: an account of justice which emphasizes social unity and public service, as well as "an appeal for laws between nations."⁹⁷ The Irish monks preserved Cicero's writings and spread them to France, Italy, and Switzerland, helping foster "the wider Carolingian revival of learning."⁹⁸ Boethius drew from Cicero's "Dream of Scipio" for his *Consolation of Philosophy*.⁹⁹ The priest Hadoard, who was custodian of a library in the Western Frankish Empire in the ninth century, wrote *Excerpta Ciceronis* and emphasized the "common interests of all people, service to society, . . . and good faith as the foundation of justice."¹⁰⁰ Hadoard also underscored Cicero's focus on the importance of candor in commercial transactions: "All pretense and dissimulation must be avoided."¹⁰¹ Finally, Gerbert of Aurillac was one of the most notable Ciceronians of the Middle Ages and became Pope Sylvester II. He claimed that true eloquence requires wisdom, and he tried to "combine the virtuous with the useful in his daily life."¹⁰²

William of Conches, of the classical cathedral school of Chartres, wrote an influential work titled *Teachings of the Philosophers on Moral Questions*, which closely follows Cicero's *On Duties* in both structure and content and includes aspects of Cicero's *De Inventione*.¹⁰³ It was a book of counsel addressed to Prince Henry, later King Henry II of England,¹⁰⁴ and was "influential in disseminating a humanistic conception of ethics throughout the Middle Ages and even in the sixteenth century" with over a hundred manuscripts in different languages, including the vernacular Old French, Italian, Franconian German, and

97 V, pp. 71–72; *De Off.* I.23; III, p. 69; *De Off.* I.36, cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 78.

98 Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 79.

99 Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, II.7, III.6, cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 77.

100 450–452; *De Off.* I.20–31, cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 83.

101 539, 541, *De Off.* III.50–61, cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 85.

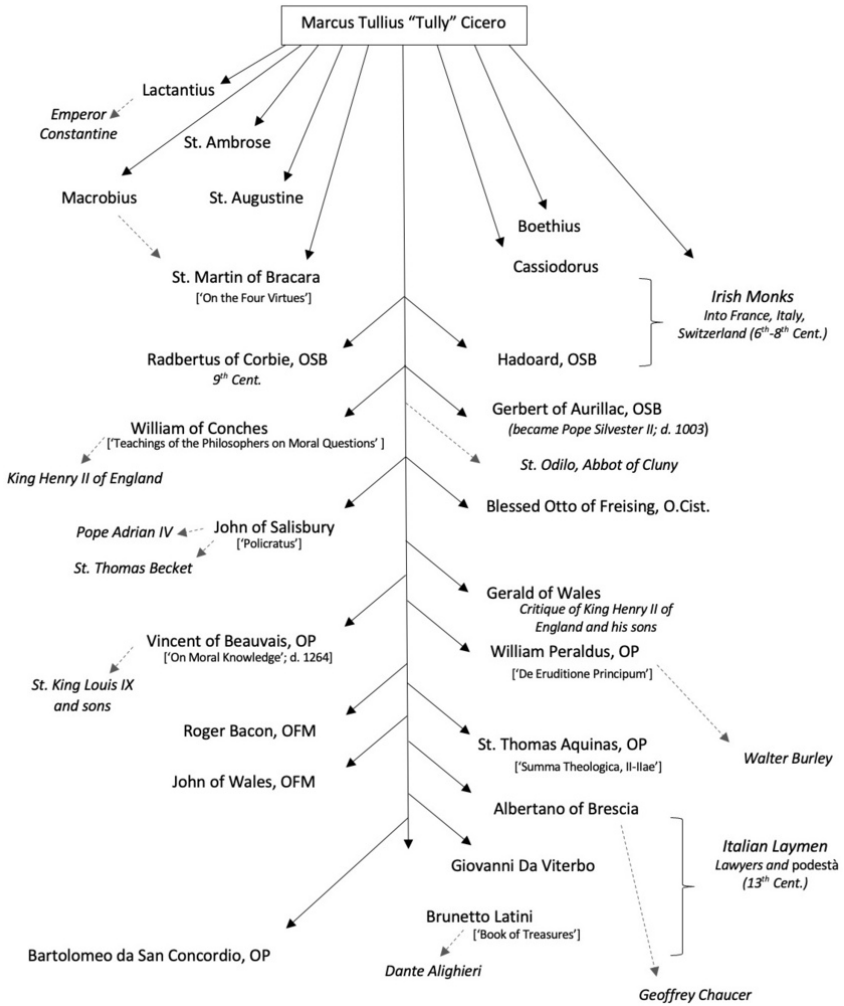
102 Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 87.

103 Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 91–92.

104 Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 91.

Figure 1. Cicero's Influence on Christian Social Thought

Direct (→) and Indirect (- ->), 4th Century to 14th Century



Icelandic.¹⁰⁵ John of Salisbury, right-hand man of Thomas á Becket and friend of Pope Adrian VI, wrote *Policratus*, using Cicero's *De Officiis*, to criticize twelfth-century politics and civilization. Through this work, Cicero emerges beyond previous ecclesiastical tracts "to preach to kings and nobles."¹⁰⁶ John shows that "virtue alone is free, but in turn, that freedom is the mother of virtue."¹⁰⁷

Late Middle Ages

Vincent of Beauvais, a Dominican and a reader to King Louis IX and his sons, compiled an immense encyclopedia which includes four books, *On Moral Knowledge*. Vincent emphasizes service to the commonwealth as an essential aspect of justice¹⁰⁸ and structures another portion of his work directly upon Cicero's *On Duties*.¹⁰⁹ Roger Bacon drew from Cicero as well as from Seneca, and another Franciscan, Joannes Gallensis, a peer of Thomas Aquinas at the University of Paris, emphasized the duties of public life¹¹⁰ and that nothing can be truly expedient which is not also just or noble.¹¹¹

Some attempts have been made to show Cicero's influence on Thomas Aquinas, but more can be said.¹¹² Although Thomas relies on Aristotle in many of the details of his treatments of ethics, he follows Cicero in the overarching structure of the four cardinal virtues in his *Summa Theologica*, II-IIae.¹¹³ Thomas cites Cicero over 325 times across all his works, and in the second part of the *Summa Theologica*, he cites only three Christian authors more often than Cicero: Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Dionysius.¹¹⁴ Thomas's writings played a

105 Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 98.

106 Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 103.

107 Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 106.

108 *On Moral Knowledge*, V, xli, p. 427, cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 115.

109 *The Speculum Historiale* (VI, vii–x), cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 114.

110 *Summa de Regimine Vitae Humanae sive Communiloquium* (Venice, 1496); see A. G. Little, *Studies in English Franciscan History* (Manchester, 1917), 190, cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 118.

111 *Summa de Regimine*, I, v, 2, f. 46r: *De Off.* III.34, cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 119.

112 See, e.g., E. K. Rand, *Cicero in the Courtroom of St. Thomas Aquinas, The Aquinas Lecture, 1945* (Marquette University Press, 1946) and Charles P. Nemeth, *A Comparative Analysis of Cicero and Aquinas: Nature and the Natural Law* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

113 Mary Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 132n21; and Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 122–23.

114 Thomas cites Cicero 187 times in the second part of the *ST*, more than he cites St. Jerome, St. John Damascene, or St. Ambrose. See Servais-Théodore Pinckaers, OP, "The Sources of the Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas" in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Georgetown University Press, 2002), 17, based on Busa's concordance.

dominant role in Christian Europe for several centuries,¹¹⁵ and he follows Cicero's account of justice and how it extends beyond national boundaries.¹¹⁶ Thomas shows that the common good is more important than our own individual profit,¹¹⁷ and he too follows Cicero's thesis that nothing can be truly expedient which is not also virtuous.¹¹⁸

In addition to the ecclesiastical tracts we have treated above, two relevant new genres were developing in the thirteenth century: instructions to princes and the writings of Italian laymen for the instruction of civic authorities. Thomas had addressed his *On Kingship* to the king of Cyprus, and Gerald of Wales relied heavily on Cicero's themes of solidarity and social responsibility in his *On the Education of Princes*, "a polemic against Henry II and his sons as tyrants and oppressors of the Church."¹¹⁹ William Peraldus, a Dominican, followed Cicero's emphasis on service to the republic and solidarity in his *De Eruditione Principum*.¹²⁰ And because the residents of the Italian city-states found many fruitful analogies with the Roman Republic, it was natural that they would turn to the writings of Cicero, the great defender and articulator of the principles of the Republic. Giovanni Nanni Da Viterbo, in his *Book on the Ruling of Republics*, draws from Cicero's *De Officiis* in his treatment of justice and the importance of subsidiarity (ca. 1230).¹²¹ Albertano of Brescia, who influenced Chaucer, structured some of his works on Cicero's *De Officiis* and detailed the role of justice beyond the republic as well as the active social virtues.¹²² Finally, Albertano's works influenced Brunetto Latini, who was Dante's teacher and who incorporated all three books of Cicero's *De Officiis* in his encyclopedic *Book of Treasures*. Brunetto emphasized Cicero's themes of solidarity and justice beyond

115 Matthew Levering and Marcus Plested, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

116 *ST II-IIae*, 58. Cf. *De Off.* 1.33–40.

117 *ST II-IIae*, 32.6, cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 123. See also Aquinas Guilbeau, OP, "Charles De Koninck's Defense of the Primacy of the Common Good" (PhD diss., University of Fribourg, 2016).

118 *ST II-IIae*, 145.3, cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 126.

119 Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 131–32.

120 Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 135–36.

121 Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 139–40; cf. *De Off.* 1.42–45.

122 Albertano of Brescia, *Liber Consolationis et Consilii*, xlvi, p. 106: *De Off.* 1, 35–36; l, p. 123: *De Off.* 1.88; xii p. 34: *De Off.* 1.136–37, cited in Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 143–45.

the borders of the republic. He incorporated at least five of the authors we have treated above, and provided an Italian translation of Martin of Bracara's *Formula of a Noble Life*.¹²³

Contemporary Application: The Role of Entrepreneurs in Society

As an example of how these four principles, rooted in Cicero's thought, can be applied to contemporary society, let us look at the role of the entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs are people who attempt to "create value for others through human excellence."¹²⁴ How do the four principles apply to the entrepreneur? (1) With human dignity, human beings reflect the divine nature not only through intellect and will, but also in the creative act of bringing about something new for the service of others, by being provident. Human beings are called to "perfect the world and [themselves] and in so doing 'share by their work in the activity of the Creator.'"¹²⁵ (2) In relation to the common good, entrepreneurs *provide* needed resources that help people flourish more easily. "The entrepreneur, with his creative work, becomes a *provident* being. This is especially demonstrated in his works of magnificence ordered toward the *common good*."¹²⁶ (3) Regarding solidarity, the entrepreneur serves customers with products and services: The dative of economics here shows that the products and services are "*for* others." The entrepreneur builds strong ties with customers, and also forms relationships with employees, partners, suppliers, and distributors, approaching the "ties of an enduring intimacy" we have seen Cicero mention. (4) And in relation to subsidiarity, entrepreneurship is a great example of the importance of private initiative which helps form smaller associations of people working together locally, in contrast to a central command economy which would try to control

123 Nelson, "Cicero's *De Officiis*," 146–52.

124 Andreas Widmer, *The Art of Principled Entrepreneurship: Creating Enduring Value* (BenBella Books, 2022), 166–67.

125 Pope John Paul II, *On Human Work (Laborem Exercens)*, no. 25, cited in Anthony Percy, *Entrepreneurship in the Catholic Tradition* (Lexington Books, 2010), 152. See also pp. 135–36: "It is man's vocation to perfect the creation—to bring it to fulfillment in accordance with the will of God. While God creates the world out of nothing and guides it by his providence, he nevertheless desires the cooperation of man in bringing his creation to fulfillment. Man, therefore, in his creative cooperation, participates in God's providence."

126 Percy, *Entrepreneurship*, 136 (emphases added). See also p. 59: St. Basil noted for the first time that the work of the merchant serves the common good; it helps alleviate poverty. Percy cites St. Basil the Great, "Nine Homilies on the Hexaemeron, Homily IV" (Upon gathering together the waters), 7, in Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, vol. 8, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd ser. (Hendrickson, 1999), 75.

everything from a distance. Entrepreneurship shows that the source of economic creativity resides with the people,¹²⁷ and that the government plays only a supporting role.

Limitations and Future Research

We have detailed many affinities between Cicero's social thought and contemporary CST, and we have begun to trace Cicero's influence on Christian social and political thought up through the beginning of the fourteenth century. But much more remains to be done, and the following research would be helpful: (1) a more developed exposition on each of the four principles of CST—both from Cicero and from other ancient philosophical sources like Aristotle, Plato, and Seneca; (2) a more detailed inquiry on specific topics in Cicero's writings, which influenced many thinkers after him: natural law, the family, justice, liberality/generosity, markets, individualism, emphasizing civic fortitude over military fortitude, and reconciling private ambition with public service; (3) a more thorough study of the historical continuities and transitions from late medieval, Renaissance, and Hispanic scholasticism, and their influence on Luigi Taparelli, SJ (a key figure in the nineteenth-century revival of Thomism who coined the phrase "social justice" and was the teacher of Pope Leo XIII), Oswald von Nell-Breuning, Heinrich Pesch, Ordoliberalism, and specific encyclicals in the tradition; (4) an analysis of specific authors who read Cicero extensively, such as Adam Smith—through their published or unpublished commentaries on Cicero's work and using bibliometric analysis—to uncover his influence on them; (5) further development of concepts to address contemporary challenges: laws of international commerce or for digital currencies that transcend national boundaries; and (6) a deeper inquiry by economists about their presuppositions regarding the nature of the human person and the *telos* of human society—and how markets can foster human flourishing. Developing a philosophical background can help us to articulate a common framework, to dialogue with Jewish and Muslim scholars and people of other faith traditions as well as people of no faith, to seek a common ground to work together. Without such research, we leave hidden multiple resources that can help us navigate the relationships between polity and commerce, between morality and markets.

¹²⁷ Percy, *Entrepreneurship*.

Summary and Conclusion

We have tried to show two things: first, that Cicero's thought lies at the root of Christian social thinking in many ways and it can be employed as a common background for Christians in navigating the uncertain waters of markets and morality; and second, that Cicero's thought offers fertile resources to find common ground with our fellow citizens who are not Christian.

These underlying principles of the nature of the human person and the nature of human society can help us understand some of the deeper, proto-evangelical similarities between Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christian social teaching. And because they are philosophical and not theological, they can provide a common ground for dialogue with non-Christians who seek the truth about human society, markets, and the flourishing of the human person. This research should help us to clarify our own concepts and may help us realize that we share more in common than we thought.