

Editorial | *The Development of Social Doctrine*

The idea of a “development of doctrine” can be occasion for controversy when applied to Christological dogma or fundamental moral principles—after all, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8), and “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13) can never become “dated.” Nevertheless, when the object of theological reflection is not immutable—not concerning the nature of God or foundational moral goodness—we should expect development. Christians are not pantheists. The world is not God. All creation constantly changes, grows, decays. There was a time when it was not, and what it is today differs from what it was yesterday. Society is no exception.

Lord Acton even notes that Christ himself contributed to this development:

when Christ said, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s,” [Matthew 2:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25] those words ... gave to the civil power, under the protection of conscience, a sacredness it had never enjoyed, and bounds it had never acknowledged; and they were the repudiation of absolutism and the inauguration of freedom. For our Lord not only delivered the precept, but created the force to execute it [i.e., the Church].¹

We see this play out in the independent charitable and economic activities of the early Church in this issue’s *Symposium*. And this distinction, however problematically, came to be incorporated into the constitution of Christian Rome after the conversion of Constantine, and later under Justinian came to be understood in Byzantium in terms of social harmony or *symphonia*. There was a realm over

which the emperor had no jurisdiction (on paper, at least). Society consisted of Church and state.

Well, not entirely. The old Roman institution of the *paterfamilias* still lingered—estate owners still had some sovereignty. We see this reflected in a new social sphere, the monastery, often founded on, and under the patronage of, private estates, and which challenged the dominion of both Church and state in Byzantium. As the founding charter by Leo, the bishop of Nauplia, for the twelfth-century Monastery of the Mother of God in Areia reads, “it is my will and desire that this ... monastery remain independent until the end of the world, and free and unenslaved by emperors and patriarchs and monasteries and metropolitans and archbishops and bishops, by archimandrites and superiors, in short, by all men.”²

Meanwhile, in the medieval West, a new social order—or “orders”—emerged: feudalism. Fr. Andrew Louth notes “the notion that became popular in the eleventh century of the ‘three orders of society’: those who fight [*bellatores*], those who pray [*oratores*], and those who work [*laboratores*].”³ He explains it was partly “a way of usefully conceptualizing a society in which earthly rule, *regnum*, and spiritual rule, *sacerdotum*, united to rule society as a whole, for which those ‘who worked’”—everyone else—“provided the necessary economic foundation.”⁴ Yet this arrangement did not go unchallenged either. Martial monastic orders, like the Knights Templar, combined the *regnum* and *sacerdotum*. And eventually another new social order emerged: guilds of merchants and tradesmen.

Alongside these classifications, a threefold understanding of society became prominent in the early modern era through catechetical commentary on the command to “Honor your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12), inclusive of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox traditions. These catechisms often expand the implications of this commandment to include not just parental authority but civil magistrates and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Thus, society consisted of family, state, and Church.

Yet by the Industrial Revolutions, this framework, too, became inadequate. Capitalist enterprises, wage labor, mass production, urbanization, trade unions—all these seismic social changes drove theologians, such as Abraham Kuyper and Luigi Taparelli, SJ—of whom new, never-before-translated works are featured in the *Status Quaestionis* section of this issue—to develop new doctrines of society once again. While Taparelli focuses on the fundamental motive-forces of self-interest (economy), justice (state), and love (Church), Kuyper, perhaps beginning with this issue’s translation by Johan Snel, eventually developed an open and adaptable social dialectic: sphere sovereignty.⁵ At the same time, by the early twentieth century, the concept of Christendom, which had justified such

a prominent place of “Church” in Christians’ social schemas, collapsed in the wake of two World Wars and the rise of religious pluralism.

Social theorists, Christian or otherwise, at the same time developed another framework, dating at least to Adam Smith: state, commerce (or economy), and beneficent (or civil) society. But is this comprehensive enough? Do all social relations fit into one of these three “buckets”? And to which should we designate the Church, which has its own systems of canon law, commerce (e.g., selling books, arts, and candles), and charity? Can theologians be content with a social theory that relegates the Body of Christ to just one of many social spheres?

Christian social theorists and social scientists continue to wrestle with this social theory problematic today. Doctrinal development is truly needed, because the object of social doctrine, society, has truly developed and changed. This development includes blessings and challenges, virtues and temptations, Providence and sin, none of which we will ever fully appreciate unless we can chart an accurate social “map” to navigate the *terra incognita* of our life together in Christ today. As always, it is a blessing to edit a journal that makes such social cartography one of its chief concerns, and it is a particular blessing to publish this issue’s articles and special features as yet another installment toward that end.

—Dylan Pahman, Executive Editor

Notes

1. John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, “The History of Freedom in Antiquity,” in *Lord Acton: Historical and Moral Essays*, ed. Dan Hugger (Grand Rapids, MI: Acton Institute, 2017), 27.
2. “*Areia: Memorandum and Typikon* of Leo, Bishop of Nauplia, for the Monastery of the Mother of God in Areia,” in *Byzantine Monastic Founding Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders’ Typika and Testaments*, vol. 1, ed. John Philip Thomas and Angela Constantinides (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000), 968.
3. Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681–1071* (Yonkers, NY: SVS Press, 2007), 294.
4. Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*, 294.
5. On sphere sovereignty as a social dialectic, see Dylan Pahman, “F.W.J. Schelling: A Philosophical Influence on Kuyper’s Social Thought,” in *Kuyper Center Review*, vol. 5: Church and Academy, ed. Gordon Graham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 26–43; idem, “Toward a Kuyperian Political Economy: On the Relationship between Ethics and Economics,” *Faith and Economics* 67 (Spring 2016): 57–84.