I. RELATIONSHIP OF RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY TO THE POLITICAL REALM.

I’m delighted and honoured to be with you in San Francisco and am grateful for the invitation. The honour was underlined by the Visa application the Lane Center ascribed me, H1-B: ‘Temporary workers in specialty occupations requiring highly specialised knowledge’. This category, says the website of the US Embassy in Brussels, also includes ‘fashion models of distinguished merit and ability’. You must judge, on either count - but I got the visa.

Let me make three general introductory remarks:

- I’m not only a member of the Church, I’m a professional Catholic. The Church and its mission is at the heart of my life. It is part of me as I am part of it. I’m happy to be a priest and a Jesuit: I’m not specially happy to be a cleric (if that means being a member of a kind of distinct caste) and I don’t see that my priesthood makes me a mid-level executive of the Magisterium. To reflect on the Magisterium as I do today is both to appreciate its necessary and positive function and to take some critical distance from it. In any case, no one is Catholic because of the Magisterium. We respect the Magisterium because we are members of the Catholic community - and because we think it deserves attention.

- Since 2005 my work has related primarily to the European Union (EU), and I’ll sometimes use that as a point of reference since the issues I want to raise often appear there in clear form: and there are some interesting points of comparison and contrast with, for example, the USA. It is not my purpose here to defend the EU, though I admit I’m a basically supportive and couldn’t do my job if I were not. (Today is the feast of St. Benedict, the main patron of Europe.)

- My overall title is ‘Religious Ethics and the Global Discourse’. You could object that ‘ethics as such’ cannot be ‘religious’: there is not a separate ethics for religious believers and for others. Ethics is the philosophical, not theological exploration of what is good and right, and Catholicism proclaims an ethical ‘natural law’ available to all. However ethics is not based on logic alone. An ethic necessarily rests on an underlying conception of human life, an anthropology. I’ll return to this idea, more than once. I think the term ‘religious ethics’ is valid as a shorthand for the ethical positions widely proposed by religious communities (even though their positions of course differ) on the basis of their anthropology. ‘Good’ can be an empty word (as children may be called ‘good’ only when they are docile). We need to ask ‘good for what?’: and that next step depends on our world-view. Christians hope to bring to ethics a deepened sense of the Creation (‘God saw that it was good’), both human and no-human. (Again, I have a long note on this if you want to return to this issue.)

This first talk considers the problem of bringing to bear an 'authoritative' discourse that is rightly central to Catholic life (the Magisterium) on the public secular sphere where that authority cannot be admitted to be decisive. In political life, magisterial claims will necessarily and rightly be judged
on other criteria: what the arguments are worth in themselves, and/or on what democratic support they can attract.

Catholic Social Teaching is a term referring to a formal body of magisterial literature, set in a broader framework of ‘Catholic social thought’ not limited to the Magisterium. It understands itself to be rooted in both reason and in revelation. But it will only be persuasive if it also helps make sense of its hearers’ own moral experience, because only that lived experience can give a reflective adult good reason to stay within the community in first place and accept the Church’s guidance. (That is why I said I am ‘not Catholic because of the Magisterium’. If I choose to obey Pope Benedict without further question, I must still accept my responsibility in making that choice.)

Authority in the Church is complex and plural, not simple and unilateral. We can distinguish:

- hierarchical authority, which is also juridical authority, with the accepted right to require assent, and to impose discipline and sanctions;

- charismatic, or prophetic authority, modelled on Jesus himself who said of the Jewish Law ‘It was said - but I say to you’. (This category includes ‘prophets’ - consistently contrasted in the Scripture with priests and kings, though there are also false prophets - and founders of religious orders (often at odds with the hierarchy but never merely hostile to it);

- the authority of the practitioner or expert who, as the moral theologian John Mahoney writes,’commands respect rather than demanding it’. A friend of mine, now dead, Joyce Poole, wrote this, in a book about her experience of being a Catholic doctor:

  The authority of the Magisterium of the Church in matters within its competence is not here being questioned but there is an authority too residing in those of us who have a lifetime of listening in close and frank contact to the problems of ordinary people.

- finally, as I have indicated there is the authority of Christian experience: in the end it is only this that enables us to accept the Magisterium.

Now if within the Christian community there is an inescapable tension between Magisterium and other sources of authority, it is not surprising that the tension can sharpen when the Church engages with external society, notably the world of politics, that has its own equally complex authority systems.

Let me take another approach. If we consider what is Christian identity, the Gospels show that following Jesus pertains to lived practice before professed belief. The Magisterium itself affirms this. In the famous first sentence of Vatican II’s Gaudium et Spes (1965) ‘the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ’. Catholic identity emerges not least from a capacity to share the experience of ‘the poor and afflicted’. Pope Benedict takes up that theme in his encyclical of 2005, Deus Caritas Est § 31:

  The Christian's programme —the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is “a heart which sees”.

In Rome last year, during the General Assembly of the global Catholic development organisation Caritas Internationalis, three Cardinals (Maradiaga, Sarah and Turkson) all followed Pope Benedict
in appealing to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10) which Cardinal Turkson called ‘the foundational parable for Caritas’ (‘the programme of Jesus’). But none of the three mentioned that this founding inspiration is a fictional character who (of course) was not a Christian: in the parable he is contrasted with those who defend their religious identity. It is their preoccupation with religious identity which leads them to ignore the traveller in need. He may be dead - therefore ritually impure. Only the religious outsider is free to practise ‘charity’. Jesus’s call to us is: ‘Go and do likewise’. What does that do to our sense of ‘Christian identity? I think it affirms it - but also defines it. The value of a consistent and truthful belief system is evident, but orthodoxy is not the heart of identity. It follows that the Church’s approach to a world in need is not to be defined by a proclamation of belief but by the capacity to inspire to ‘do likewise’, to practise charity and justice.

II

It does this paying close attention to the cultural and political context in which it operates. This context is secular. Here, there is a striking difference between contemporary Europe and the USA. Both Europe and the USA are secular. But Europe has also followed a different path from the USA, towards not ‘secularity’ but ‘secularism’. I define those key terms as follows:

- **Secularity** in the political arena entails the procedural impartiality of the state and of civic institutions - between religions, and between religious and non-religious groups. Public debate may occur freely and vigorously between world-views, but no such world view may claim state sponsorship.

- **Secularism** proposes the exclusion of religious belief and expression from public debate. On this view, ‘freedom of religion’ entitles you to believe what you wish, but not to make religious arguments in the public sphere. Religion becomes a private matter. But no Christian can accept that religious expression should be radically excluded from the public sphere (as if God were Lord of only part of our lives). How it engages is a different question, and I’ll look at that in the third presentation.

Today, though, even in Europe, secularism is giving way to ‘post-secularism’, the sense that it is futile or wrong to dismiss religious convictions from the public sphere. The emergence of post-secularism has an intrinsic logic. But for our purposes, the extrinsic, contextual factors are of special interest:

- the collapse of the great atheistic, religion-suppressing, twentieth-century movements, especially since these movements (led by such as Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot) destroyed more lives than religion ever did. No one can nowadays plausibly link massive violence primarily to religion;
- the rise of Islam - which everyone realises cannot plausibly be restricted to the so-called private sphere;
- the entry into the EU in 2004 and 2007 of states with very different models of church-state relations than that of, say, France: Poland, Malta, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania, etc.

So now, in Europe, (unlike in a ‘secularist’ society) religious argument has a clear entry point to public debate, as I suppose it has always had in the USA. Conversely the Church acknowledges the secularity of the state and the limits to be placed on the Church’s political role. During his state visit to the UK in September, 2010 Pope Benedict said this:
‘Objective norms governing right action are accessible to reason . . . . The role of religion in political debate is not so much to supply these norms, as if they could not be known by non-believers – still less to propose concrete political solutions, which would lie altogether outside the competence of religion – but rather to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles’.

So the Church is not competent to propose ‘concrete political solutions; it neither claims ‘power over the State’, nor wishes to impose what is proper to faith on those who do not share it. The Church’s role is ‘to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles’. This role was earlier well expressed in Deus Caritas Est (2005) §.28. I quote fully because this next passage underlies the rest of what I want to say today:

The origin and goal [of politics] are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics. The State must inevitably face the question of how justice can be achieved here and now. . . . The problem is one of practical reason; but if reason is to be exercised properly, it must undergo constant purification, since it can never be completely free of the danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests. . . . The Church cannot and must not replace the State. Yet . . . she has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper.

That statement at the same time affirms both secularity - the responsibility for justice in public life which the state cannot delegate - and the Church’s responsibility to offer both rational argument, and spiritual energy. The relevant magisterial literature here is that of Catholic Social Teaching’.

III

I list five areas (not exclusive) where the magisterial Church Social Teaching seems to me of deep value (both rationally and so as ‘to awaken spiritual energy’. Given the limits of time, I’ll enlarge on just the last two.

1. The simultaneous assertion of ‘Human Dignity’ and the ‘Common Good’: as against ‘utilitarianism’, for example, which in its classic formulation aims at ‘the greatest good of the greatest number’ and therefore too easily sets aside the well-being of the smaller number. The Common Good is denied when the poor are set aside. It begins from them.

2. The principles of solidarity and subsidiarity which (at least in the EU) have passed into public debate, but in a diluted or distorted form that the Church is well placed to challenge;

3. The almost universal defence by the hierarchy of migrants and asylum-seekers, even where the Church leadership may otherwise be conservative and socially conformist. The Church has a far greater sense than most national leaders that an African or an Iraqi life has a value equal to that of a US or British life. Universality is not just a concept in the Church: it is an experience and a defining element.

4. The interdependence of Charity and Justice: Deus Caritas Est argues that ‘love’ is a single reality, with different but inseparable dimensions’ (§.26–28). (There are, for instance, four Greek words for love.) Caritas in Veritate develops this argument. ‘Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is “mine” to the other; but it never lacks
justice, which prompts us to give others what is “theirs”...I cannot “give” what is mine to others, without first giving them what pertains to them in justice.... Justice is the primary way of charity...§6). ‘This is the institutional path – we might also call it the political path – of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbour directly, outside the institutional mediation of the polis’ §7.

To be fully human, a person must integrate charity and justice. Admittedly one cannot easily require ‘love’ of a state. However, to take a European example, this argument bears on the EU’s policy coherence. The EU’s development policy – animated by ‘charity’ – is impressive (ECHO is the largest development fund in the world, twice the size of USAID). The EU’s trade policy (significantly the only policy field in which the EU’s central institutions act with full authority on behalf of member states) reflects the paradigm of a harsh competitive struggle among the EU, the USA and the emerging economic powers of China, India and so on. Yet the sustainable development of poorer countries depends far more on just trade than on official development aid. (In my third talk, I’ll offer an example of how our office responds to this challenge.

5. Finally, to focus as precisely as possible, let me note the weight of a single argument of John Paul II’s Centesimus Annus (1991). He attributes to the state:

the task of determining the juridical framework within which economic affairs are to be conducted, and thus of safeguarding the prerequisites of a free economy [my emphasis], which presumes a certain equality between the parties, such that one party would not be so powerful as to reduce the other to subservience §15.

Writing when he did, Pope John Paul confronted the pervasive sense that after the collapse of communism there was no plausible brake on market capitalism. Prominent thinkers of the so-called ‘New Right’ such as Friedrich Hayek rejected any attempt to seek some desired social outcome by managing or limiting the working of the market. New Right thinkers argued that it is illegitimate or even meaningless to evaluate ‘society’ as if it had to fit some a priori ideal of justice, such as ‘a certain equality between the parties’. Since individuals have diverse goals, the very notion of imposing on them a ‘desired social outcome’ merely reflects the coercive power of the state and the prejudices of bureaucrats. On Hayek’s view, ‘social justice’ and ‘individual freedom’ are either irreconcilable - or they are identical (so that individual maximum individual freedom defines social justice. Accordingly, Hayek claims that the ‘free market’ is the core of human freedom.

Confronting that position, Centesimus Annus contrasts a ‘free-market economy’ with a ‘free economy’ - because for him justice and freedom are mutually dependent. (There is a radically different sense of freedom, a different anthropology.) Where an economic system is absolutised at the expense of other dimensions of life, ‘economic freedom’ alienates and oppresses the human person (CA §39). (As the American theologian Joe Holland once said, ‘The economy’s doing fine. Its just the people having a hard time.) I find this argument of the Magisterium faith-filled, salutary, and deeply human.
I have identified what kind of contribution the Magisterium’ can make. It is a fine base for a critique of national governments and their policies, and they recognise this, if sometimes grudgingly.

What then, is the problem in practice? The challenge pertains to the whole genre of ‘magisterial’ literature – in our context, notably the central encyclicals of Catholic Social Teaching. This literary genre of ‘magisterial documents’, like any other literary genre, has certain limitations. It is not a criticism to say that: no tool is good for all jobs. However, magisterial documents do not incorporate methodological discussions, therefore do not themselves draw attention to these limitations. Readers need to acknowledge them to use the documents intelligently. I mention four potential problems, but will expand on three, saving one for next week.

1) The problem of the non-recognition of Church authority

The magisterial perspective claims an overarching teaching authority, holding together ‘reason’ and ‘revelation’, so it can engage with those of no religious belief, while drawing on Scripture and Christian doctrines and traditions as a privileged source of light for Christians. However, as I have already indicated, it functions in a culture where authority is not ‘overarching’, but is plural and contested. I quote a British Jesuit, Gerard J Hughes: ‘There is no specifically Christian authority in ethics by appeal to which we can effectively hope to foreclose any moral argument’ . Any moral authority ‘owes its status as an authority to the success with which it interprets the facts, and it is to these alone that any ultimate appeal can be made’.

I said that people will not accept magisterial claims unless their experience gives prior ground for trusting the Church. Politicians in particular cannot simply accept those claims. Even when, in 2007, the then French President Nicholas Sarkozy advocated what he called a ‘laïcité positive’, he then had to insist that political decisions would never be made in France on religious grounds. Laïcité, he said, remains ‘a fundamental claim to liberty - freedom both to accept and reject religious belief and practice.

2) The problem of different conceptions of reason

Even if ‘reason and revelation’ are indeed held together, the term ‘reason’ here has a special sense for the Magisterium. Caritas in Veritate contrasts two types of reasoning, between which we are ‘forced to choose’: ‘reason open to transcendence or reason closed within immanence’ (§.74).

Behind this polarity lies the encyclical Fides et Ratio of John Paul II, §.4, which identifies a core of philosophical insight within the history of thought as a whole:

Consider . . . the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject with the capacity to know God. Consider as well certain fundamental moral norms which are shared by all.’ . . . [This knowledge] 'should serve as a kind of reference point for the different philosophical schools. Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the first universal principles of being, and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called right reason, or, as the ancients called it, orthós logos, recta ratio.

This passage is philosophically controversial, building is as a reference point the claim that the person ‘has the capacity to know God’, which may beg the very question at issue: but it states
clearly what Popes John Paul II and Benedict mean by reason. In the secular sphere, however, what interests policy-makers is not *recta ratio* but *critical reason* – where arguments are tested through criticism.

The notion of analytical and critical reason, however, is not *alien* to Christianity. The English poet John Donne wrote this illuminating passage in 1608: ‘Because I thought that as in the poole of Bethsaida. there was no health till the water was troubled, so the best way to finde the truth in this matter was to debate and vexe it (for we must as well dispute de veritate as pro veritate’). *(Biathanatos, 1608)*. *We need* to argue things out within the community!

Magisterial documents avoid or short-circuit this process of ‘disputing de veritate’. Claiming authority, they do not ‘dispute’. Neither the social encyclicals or, more generally, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* seek to justify by *argument* the positions taken, nor discuss opposing arguments that are finally rejected. The material itself is in no way ‘fundamentalist’, but it invites a *reception* that is not far from fundamentalist: it calls for assent to conclusions, dissociated from the thought-process.

This avoidance of debate is reinforced by Pope Benedict’s preferred usage (or that of his English translators) ‘Catholic Social Doctrine’. (In the official English text of *Caritas in Veritate*, the expression ‘social teaching’ occurs four times, the expression ‘social doctrine’ more than twenty times.) Whether or not it is the Pope’s intention, speaking of ‘doctrine’ removes the text from the sphere of publicly contestable discourse. Thereby it leaves those outside the Church (including politicians) who by definition do not accept Catholic ‘doctrine’ at a loss how to deal with it.

It follows, too, that magisterial discourse presumes the vitality of a complementary Catholic discourse that is properly critical, engaging - with due modesty - the positions of the Magisterium. Once questioning stops, answers are hollow: but the questions are perennial, and arise from within Christian faith as well as from outside it.

3) The problem of a monolithic and generalised language about values

Values are complex, plural and contested, they necessarily come into tension. I’ll discuss this point next week, but let me give one illustration to flag up the issue. Almost everyone will affirm the value of ‘human dignity’. However a Catholic appealing to this value may readily conclude that euthanasia is morally unacceptable. (Our dignity as children of God includes our acceptance that life is a *transcendent gift*, and therefore is not ours to dispose of.) A secular humanist may invoke the same value (or a value with the same name) to deduce that when our life ‘loses dignity’ we have the right to end it. The famous Swiss euthanasia clinic names itself *Dignitas* precisely to lay claim to this value. *One cannot settle the conflict of interpretation just by proclaiming the value.*

4) The tension between authority and competence

This distinction derives from the famous essay of Max Weber, ‘Politics as a Vocation’ (1919). He distinguished ‘the ethics of conviction’ from the ‘ethics of responsibility’: on the one hand, clear and unambiguous principles; on the other hand, the work of those who cannot avoid responsibility for consequences. Each ethic is indispensable. The Christian thinker Paul Ricoeur suggests that the ‘ethic of responsibility’, if it lacks a firm sense of conviction or principle, may degenerate into mere pragmatism, judging the morality of an action only by its immediate outcome. The ethic of
conviction (Ricoeur gives the example of the Sermon on the Mount) articulates an ‘optimum ethic’ and is necessary to orient action towards the good of humanity and of each person.\textsuperscript{14} But the ethic of conviction, writes Ricoeur, taken alone, without a careful and competent analysis of the specific situation, lacks responsibility and ‘falls into moralism and clericalism’.\textsuperscript{15}

Now political decisions are the above all acts of ‘responsibility’. Only those involved can determine how far any principle applies in a given situation and how far it gives way to other principles, according to some ‘hierarchy of good’. This is the realm of the classic virtue of prudence - which presumes being principled and being realistic, being aware, conscientious and engaged. To be Catholic is to share a world-view (though not necessarily every expression of that world-view). But on Pope Benedict’s own account it is not the Church as such, still less the Magisterium, which can judge how to make principles effective in the world of public policy.

V (A preliminary conclusion)

\textit{Caritas in Veritate} was held back for several months, from the reasonable (prudent!) concern to avoid saying anything about the fast-moving financial crisis of 2008–9 that would later seem silly. It was issued on 29 June 2009, on the eve of the Swedish Presidency of the EU.

A few days later, travelling on the Brussels equivalent of BART, I met a senior EU official who is a pillar of the Catholic lay movement in France, theologically literate. He had just returned from a meeting in Sweden with officials the Swedish government which was assuming the six-monthly presidency of the EU. He told me that \textit{Caritas in Veritate} had attracted a surprising degree of political interest. However, what puzzled my friend’s secular colleagues was that the first half of the encyclical discussed the recent history of Church Social Teaching, Christology, and so on; in the second half, one or two brief paragraphs were devoted to each of an extended series of pressing issues (population, global governance, economic ethics, the natural environment, etc), even though - I quote - ‘the Pope had obviously not listened to many social scientists’.

The social encyclicals offer a rich expression of the relationship of faith to contemporary public life. However they are neither congenial to, nor readily understandable by, the secular democracy which proceeds by debate and by mutual criticism, which is at best enlightening and at worst strident and capable of its own fundamentalisms.

The teaching needs not only to be of high intellectual quality. It needs to be presented in such a manner, as to commend itself in dialogue to those with secular policy responsibility. Second, the impact of the teaching depends on the broader ecclesial context. I know of politicians I believe to be in good faith, who are personally open and helpful to us, who are sometimes scandalised by how they see the Church acting publicly, so that they do not find the official Church a credible partner for those who take these ideals as fundamental to mature democratic politics.\textsuperscript{16}
There are 48 nation-states in Europe. (27 are members of the EU, 47 members of the broader Council of Europe.) The massive destruction of the twentieth century was overwhelmingly caused by wars and conflicts between these states - by fierce nationalisms. I believe that the EU enables states to transcend (not surrender) their national identity and interests by exercising political authority together with other states; and by establishing economic arrangements that embody a degree of transnational care for the weaker. Like all powerful collectivities, the EU constantly falls short of its aspirations. But the aspiration itself, to construct by consent a new kind of political body that relativises the power of sovereign states, that is adequate to the transnational realities of the modern world, that is neither simply hierarchical nor simply market-oriented is a remarkable and unique adventure. (It does not apply, for example, to the UN, where the nations cooperate - but ultimately represent only themselves.)

The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre argues, if we strive to do the will of God because we say God is good, it follows that ‘good’ must be defined in terms other than those of obedience to God - or we are in a vacuous circularity. At least in the tradition of Aristotle and his Christian interpreter Thomas Aquinas (Luther thought differently), something is not good because God wills it: God will it because it is good) By contrast, for Luther, as opposed to Aquinas, something is good because God wills it. That, precisely, is ‘religious ethic’. We derive our sense of what is good from a theological commitment to God. He hold that in part because of his belief that human reason is fundamentally corrupt. Our status before God is not determined by our ethics. Whether we do the humanly good or not, we are only justified by faith (MacIntyre, op.cit). So, for example, in the story of Abraham and Isaac, Abraham is justified because he put his faith in God - even to the point of being willing to kill his son. Human ethical judgements - e.g., that nothing could justify killing your son - are irrelevant. Similarly, certain kings of Israel are condemned for failing to obey God by slaughtering their defeated and surrendered enemies. The ‘true prophet’ Elijah slaughters the priests of Baal after his God proves more powerful than theirs. Catholics have to interpret these stories in a different way - and I am fascinated that the Catholic lectionary, having given the long story of Elijah and the priests, shysly (almost dishonestly) leaves out this very last verse! In the New Testament, Mark 7, the reference to Corban offers a good example of how ‘religious ethics’ can work against what is humanly good - and be condemned by Jesus himself for that reason.

I often think of three possible ‘fundamentalisms’ which could be called Protestant, Catholic, and liberal: of the Scripture, of the traditions and ‘teaching’ of the Church, and of the individual’s own moral opinion.

Joyce Poole, The Cross of Unknowing, Dilemmas of a Catholic Doctor, Sheed & Ward, London, 1989, p.4

This command is one basis of Christian engagement in politics, since those in need suffer from unjust systems, not just from direct personal attack.

Our Jesuit colleagues in India and Egypt, for example, strongly urge a secular politics: the alternative would be, in Egypt, an Islamist politics (of the kind previously espoused by the Muslim Brotherhood); in India the recent Hindu nationalist politics that deeply discriminated against Christians.

The dominant European model of secularism was that of France. It derives partly from an understandable reaction to the Church’s excessive political influence within the ancien régime, partly from the paradigm of the French constitution: there are two quasi-absolutes, state and citizen, and every intermediate association is subordinate to these two: corporations, labour unions, religious bodies. The Church in France has of course learned to negotiate the status quo.

I leave aside for our purpose the third term of this classification, secularisation - the prolonged cultural process by which almost every field of study and action is seen to have an inherent logic and autonomy, and is not to be governed by extrinsic religious considerations. The Church’s opposition to Galileo was not mainly about his competence as an astronomer or mathematician. The Church thought he could not be right - e.g., in saying that the earth moved round the sun - on what seemed to be theological and Scriptural grounds. grounds. E.g., Ps 93: 1: ‘The Lord has established the world; it shall never be moved’ - which the Inquisition took literally and Galileo - a better biblical scholar - took as poetic imagery!
For example a) It is acknowledged that religious consciousness, far from being a danger to society, is a civic asset, forming in believers a strong sense of community, moral seriousness, personal integrity and civic responsibility.

b) It is unjust and irrational that religious people are asked, in the name of tolerance and cultural pluralism, to keep their beliefs and norms ‘private’ in order to avoid disturbing the public project of secularism. Ejecting religious belief from the public realm excludes from discussion many people’s deepest beliefs about human life: so it injects public debates with a sense of unreality, while denying the pluralism that one claims to safeguard;

c) this so-called ‘private realm’ to which religion is ex hypothesi confined is in no way removed from politics but is itself politicised: thus, for example, the nature of the family is now a key and contested issue of public policy.


Solidarity is the moral duty that follows from the fact that we are created by God not just as isolated individuals but as persons who are always interconnected, in relation. It is through solidarity that we express love – most obviously example to those individuals whom we will never meet but who are still our sisters and brothers. In EU documents it is used in the diminished sense of any policy of moderate redistribution, but at the convenience of the prosperous. You can tell me if it is a reality in American political rhetoric. Subsidiarity (according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, §.1883, is the principle by which ‘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’. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, para 1883). In the EU it becomes shorthand for nation-states resistance to directives from Brussels - however centralising those states may be internally, in the case of the UK under Mrs Thatcher.


(Of course the Sermon on the Mount has its own complications - e.g., the rather divergent lists of Beatitudes in Matthew and in Luke.)


I’m thinking of a Catholic woman politician, not currently church-going but a person of faith. She remains in dialogue with institutions of the hierarchy, but is offended by its dramatic lack of transparency, and its all-to-common disparagement of & neglect of women.