DONUT SHOPS AND WORLD PEACE: SUBSIDIARITY AND THE BIAS FOR THE LOCAL

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I trace the principle of subsidiarity (social and legal matters ought to be handled at the most local and appropriate level) to show how it has been used as a middle ground to privilege decision making and autonomy at local levels. The use of subsidiarity recognizes that not all decisions are best handled at the local level, in which case other levels (such as national governments and international organizations) should intervene, but that they should do so only if their intervention contributes to the common good, the local good, and the autonomy and dignity of individuals. I show how this principle has been applied in papal teachings, Catholic Social Tradition, by environmentalists, and in criminal justice work.

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'I know how to achieve world peace.' Dennis had my full attention; after all, thinking, writing, and teaching about peace occupies much of my professional and personal life. 'Mom and pop donut shops!' Dennis still had my full attention, but now my attention was focused on how donut shops could possibly be the solution to world peace. Over the next several weeks, we came back to this discussion more than once, and I have come to believe that his suggestion contains observations about the importance of local communities within a global context that may in fact lead closer to peace.

As I pressed Dennis for more details as to how mom and pop donut shops could lead to world peace, he talked about the place and the atmosphere of the donut shops from his childhood. The donut shops were part of the local community, the donuts were all displayed in a glass case, and people would gather there and talk about local events and catch up on one another's lives. In contrast to his idealistic vision of donut shops from his youth, we talked about Dunkin Donuts and Krispy Kreme, stores that look the same wherever they are, owned by a corporation, and operated by underpaid employees who would rather not be there. The mom and pop donut shop and our conversations about its role in creating world peace embody relationships that can help us to appreciate and critique local contexts, learn from and participate in the diversity of the global community, and foster an increasing awareness of the need to privilege local institutions and com-

munities even as we acknowledge that these institutions and communities function within a global context.

In order to have peace (not simply the absence of overt violence), people need to be invested in their communities: their neighbors, the businesses, and the politics. The appeal of the donut shop that Dennis described is that it privileges the local community, but the world has become increasingly diverse and people around the world are increasingly connected. Within this context rational people will not always agree; and for people to flourish, communities need structures in which conflict promotes growth and justice rather than violence. Further, we need structures that can privilege the local and provide means to address conflicts that cannot be resolved at the local level. Within the Roman Catholic Church and the European Union, the principle of subsidiarity has been developed to promote just conditions between local communities and the larger institutions that impact them. The application of subsidiarity is also becoming more widespread in the work of people who are negotiating for local rights within global institutions, such as in the work of environmentalists and in the field of criminal justice. The principle of subsidiarity – social and legal matters ought to be handled at the most local and appropriate level – provides a basic, normative ideal by which state, national, and international structures can be assessed.

Subsidiarity within Roman Catholic Church Teaching

When applying the principle of subsidiarity to the local donut shop, one can easily see what the ideal interaction would be between the owners of the shop and the workers. As long as the owners of the shop treat their workers fairly and pay them in such a way that they can live with dignity, then they ought to have the right to make decisions about the shop without interference from government at a local, national, or international level. Further, subsidiarity allows for a theoretical and practical position in which different classes can exist in a just way. The owners of the shop ought to make more money than those who work there since they have more responsibility and more work than those whose job only entails a limited number of hours, expertise, and decisions. However, the owners' profits ought not come at the expense of the workers' ability to make a living wage. Yet, even in 1891, the relationship between owners and workers was far less personal and obvious, and people concerned with social justice began to critique the injustice and to propose ways to deal with that injustice. In particular, the Roman Catholic Church became a leading voice in critiquing unjust conditions and laying out principles to ameliorate the injustice.

In *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII wrote an encyclical to address the suffering and injustice happening to workers around the world and the attempts of socialists to address this suffering by eliminating private property (Catholic Church. Pope [1878–1903: Leo XIII] 1939). The ideas that he introduced in this 1891 encyclical would eventually lead to the principle of subsidiarity. In response to these tensions, Leo XIII lays out a response that would balance a respect for individuals and the differences between them with the common good. Central to the principle of subsidiarity is that people have a right to private property, that no society can or should eliminate all class difference, and that all people have a right to a living wage as a result of their work. The middle path

that Leo XIII introduced has not only informed Catholic Social Teaching (CST), but also was formally adopted by the European Union (EU) in 1992 and continues to inform the policies and laws within the EU.[1]

By 1891, workers and owners were already separated by a growing chasm in many workplaces; owners profited at the expense of workers. In response to this disparity, socialism's call for an end to private property was finding increasing support among workers who saw little if any connection between their work and having access to private property. When Leo XIII addresses the tension between workers and owners, he uses three premises about what it means to be human: 1) people ought to have private property; 2) people ought to have dignity; and 3) people will always belong to different classes. Thus, he rejects the socialist project of eliminating private property, but acknowledges the fundamental critique of capitalism as robbing people of their dignity in order to realize profit. Ideally, owners and workers would have a change of heart and recognize the Christian call to charity and dignity, and they would work together for a common good. Though he stresses what the ideal ought to be, Leo XIII is not naïve and recognizes that people will not necessarily do what they ought to do in which case institutional structures should provide for the needs that are not being met privately.

The formal definition of subsidiarity was first articulated by Pope Pius XI in 1931 in the encylical *Quadragesimo Anno* ('On Reconstruction of the Social Order') (Catholic Church. Pope [1922–1939: Pius XI] 1931). In this encyclical, Pius clarifies the teachings of Leo XIII, and argues even more strongly for the importance of local control as the privileged place of economics and politics. Pius XI clarifies that the Church teaches that people have a right to private property, but that right is not unlimited; people must contribute to the common good and all people have a right to the means to work and live a dignified life (*Ibid.*). According to Pius XI, people are not entitled to use private property in any way that they see fit, but they ought to use the land in a way that is just, which means that people must respect others, their dignity, and their property (*Ibid.*). When owners fail to do so, the State has an obligation to bring private ownership into harmony with the common good (*Ibid.*). Throughout this encyclical, Pius XI emphasizes the need to balance the good for the individual and the common good. He does not call for equality between all workers, but he calls for harmony such that the good of owners and workers will coincide and that their goods will also coincide with the good of the State (*Ibid.*: 71–76). The harmony between owners and workers, individuals and the states relies on the principle of subsidiarity. Pius XI writes,

> Still, that most weighty principle, which cannot be set aside or changed, remains fixed and unshaken in social philosophy: 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 (*Ibid.:* 79).

Pius XI draws from social philosophy an observation about the right relationship between the individual and community, and free associations and the State. The individual is entitled to the fruits of her/his labor, efforts, and private property so long as those do

not interfere with the common good and the dignity of others. Within the community, people have a right to free association whether those associations are by profession, religion, or common social interest (Catholic Church. Pope [1922–1939: Pius XI] 1931: 85–87). The premise behind Pius XI's use of subsidiarity is that these free associations at a local level are better situated to solve immediate problems than those associations above it.

As is clear in Pius XI's articulation of subsidiarity, this principle within CST is in response to practical considerations as much as in response to theological considerations. According to Davud McIlroy, 'The theological point subsidiarity makes is not necessarily that lower level power structures are less likely to be sinful than higher level ones, but that higher level power structures have greater potential for abuse and misuse, and therefore ought only to be created when it is necessary to do so' (McIlroy 2003: 743). McIlroy acknowledges that the distinction between higher levels and lower levels will not reveal whether or not a level is sinful, that sort of assessment can be left to theologians, but what it demonstrates is that taking control away from local levels ought to have justification; local levels should only be subject to higher levels of control when it can be demonstrated that they cannot successfully address an issue at the local level. Because subsidiarity is based on a belief that every human has dignity, taking power away from local control is problematic because 'the further power is centralized upwards, the more the voice of each individual citizen is diluted' (*Ibid.:* 746). Within the local community, an individual has a better chance of making her/his voice heard; certainly, local control does not guarantee that any individual voice will be heard, but it does make it more likely and more easily achieved. In response to criticisms that the principle of subsidiarity is vague and not practical enough, McIlroy responds that 'Subsidiarity does not have the status of a primary goal within the European legal order. Rather it is a restraining principle' (*Ibid.:* 749). Subsidiarity, both in CST and in the EU, lays out a position in which the preferred state of affairs is to have local control. When an institution or government wants to move control to a higher level, they must make a case as to why the lower level has been unsuccessful and how that failure can be overcome at a higher level. The primary goal which subsidiarity serves remains to be determined by communities.

Kent Van Til traces the history of subsidiarity in CST and notes two important points about subsidiarity, 'The first is that of "greater and lesser". It emphasizes a hierarchical principle in which greater associations support the lesser and permits lesser associations to accomplish smaller tasks' (Van Til 2008: 618). In this account the privileged position is that of the smaller parts; that is the preference is to protect the dignity of individuals, and every grouping beyond the individual should contribute both to a common good at that level and the good for every level below it, continuing down to individuals' dignity. Related to this first theme, Van Til identifies a second theme, 'The good for that creature is that it fulfills its own *telos*. Given the differences among creatures and people, there must be a wide range of *teloi*. Even within each person, there are various *teloi*' (*Ibid.*: 619). By promoting a hierarchy between levels of association, ideally every individual will have an opportunity to discover her/his unique purpose and talents and to use that purpose and talent to contribute to the common good.

Theologians' articulation of the importance of practical considerations, the common good, and individual dignity are also emphasized in the teachings from the papacy. Throughout *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II continues the analysis begun by his predecessors and CST that recognizes the complexity of protecting the rights of each individual person, individual communities, and a shared world (Catholic Church. Pope [1978–2005: John Paul II] 1988). When John Paul II considers the relationship between developing countries and industrial countries, he warns against undermining the autonomy of developing nations and simply making them 'become parts of a machine, cogs on a gigantic wheel' (*Ibid.:* 22). Perhaps, the most crucial development that John Paul II adds to the Roman Catholic emphasis on subsidiarity is that he does not assume that the Church's metaphysical beliefs about the human person and the human person's relationship to God are held by all people, or even that they should be held by all people. Instead, John Paul II points out that the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the growing acceptance of the principles within gives hope that diverse countries with diverse beliefs can work together in recognition of each other's interdependence and autonomy (*Ibid.:* 26, 33).

Even now, when capitalism has become the dominant economic force around the world, the principle of subsidiarity continues to be central within Catholic Social Teaching (CST). Subsidiarity still functions as a powerful critical tool because it emphasizes that people should have autonomy and that global capitalism frequently deprives people of autonomy and dignity. In *Caritas in veritate* ('Charity in Truth') Pope Benedict XVI continues this tradition by using subsidiarity to his critique of society today (Catholic Church. Pope [2005– : Benedict XVI] 2009). As did his predecessors, Benedict XVI emphasizes that people have a right to private property and that businesses have a right to profit, but those rights cannot interfere with the 'actual living conditions of the people in a given region' (*Ibid.:* 47). Benedict emphasizes that subsidiarity contributes to the dignity and autonomy of humans because the relationship between the person, the community, and institutions is one that should privilege the person. A higher order offers assistance to people in order to help them realize goals that they cannot attain on their own; the assistance is for the purpose of allowing people to assume responsibility (*Ibid.:* 57). What is notable in Benedict's discussion of subsidiarity is its connection to solidarity. When a higher order gives assistance, it must work *with* the lower order. Failure to work with those that one aids undermines their autonomy and their ability to assume responsibility. While the Roman Catholic Church has been instrumental in developing the principle of subsidiarity, the principle needs grounding beyond a single religious tradition for it to play a role in mediating between differences.

Social Justice Applications of Subsidiarity

Today, the tension persists between those with access to wealth and power and those who live in poverty and have limited political power. According to the United Nations University-World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), the richest one percent of the world own forty percent of the world's wealth and the top two percent have more than half of the world's wealth (Davies and World Institute for Development Economics Research 2008). UNU-WIDER's analysis also reveals that wealth

is highly concentrated in North America (34.4 %), Europe (29.6 %), and the 'Rich Asia-Pacific' (24.1 %) (Davies and World Institute for Development Economics Research 2008: 8). 88.1 % of the world's wealth is concentrated in three regions, which only account for 26 % of the world's population (*Ibid.*). This inequity in wealth distribution results in inequitable distributions of power for these three regions and inequitable distribution of poverty throughout the rest of the world. This reality is alarming and ought to be addressed if people, and not just those influenced by CST, agree that all people have a right to dignity and autonomy.

The very existence of statistics from UNU-WIDER indicates the agreement between people from incredibly diverse backgrounds that all people do have a right to dignity and autonomy. In 1949, nations from profoundly different religious, political, and social traditions endorsed the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which affirms the basic premise that all people have a right to live a life of dignity (Nolde and United Nations. General Assembly 1949). Whereas Pope Leo relied on Catholic doctrine to support this premise, the UDHR comes to this out of international consensus and not metaphysical principles. Pope Leo XIII also relies on metaphysical principles to assert that people have a right to private property and will always belong to different classes. Rather than looking for some sort of natural principle to support or refute his claim, people can begin from the fact of private property and the fact of classes. From this perspective, people from diverse communities and traditions have agreed that the ways in which wealth and private property are distributed between classes makes it impossible for some people to live a dignified life. Since people also agree that all people ought to be able to live dignified lives, the challenge is to find ways to make this ideal possible from the local level to the international levels.

One possibility for implementing subsidiarity politically is to link it with democracy. Andreas Follesdal advocates this position and argues that this is the way in which subsidiarity has been used in the European Union. Follesdal connects the principle of subsidiarity to the goals of democracy and writes, 'policies must be controlled by those affected, to ensure that institutions and laws reflect the interests of the individuals under conditions where all count as equals. Only when these considerations counsel joint action is central authority warranted' (Follesdal 2006: 64). The belief that individuals have a right to dignity and autonomy in their lives is at the heart of democracy; it is not exclusively a religious concern. In tracing the history of 'subsidiarity' within the EU, Follesdal points out that this principle is meant to alleviate fears of centralization within the EU. He also points out that because centralization is not ruled out those fears cannot be entirely eliminated (*Ibid.:* 66–67). Any application of subsidiarity, though, will have to deal with the tension between how much control is needed beyond the local. This tension can help to encourage debate, critique, and solutions within a democracy; that disagreements are possible is not inherently problematic and the principle of subsidiarity gives participants guidance as to how they ought to work through disagreement.

The principle of subsidiarity gives direction for settling disagreements through its affirmation of two points: first, subsidiarity privileges the local; second, subsidiarity acknowledges that the local cannot address every economic and political issue that can arise and so regional, national, and international structures are needed to protect local

autonomy. In order to understand how the relationship between the local and the global can be mediated, we can turn to the work of environmental activists. Jerry Mander, the founder of the International Forum on Globalization, gives one of the clearest accounts of the environmental movement's privileging of the local as a response to globalization (Mander 2009: 37–41). The problems associated with globalization have been evident since the 19th century, as is evident in Leo XIII's encyclical. Then, as now, economic growth was premised on a model of continuous growth. Even at that time, the model of increasing growth was flawed since increased growth for some people meant decreased wealth, resources, and dignity for others. Nevertheless, the model of economic growth flourished because environmental resources were readily available to be developed and used to expand wealth. Two centuries later, environmental resources are becoming scarcer and the effects of longtime abuse of these resources are increasingly obvious. Mander points out that in response to resource shortages many people have argued that we need global institutions to respond to global economic problems; however, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have not brought us global democracy, rather they have institutionalized the privileges of wealthy countries and capitalism as the only possible economic model (*Ibid.:* 39). Mander's response to this is that localized control has more promise for resolving environmental and economic crises than globalized control (*Ibid*.). The perspective, that Mander develops, promotes a perspective that recognizes that local communities will not always be democratic and will not always be environmentally responsible. Instead, this perspective says that local communities are more likely to be democratic and more likely to be environmentally responsible. The next step, then, is to define structures or procedures that will allow us to continually assess our local communities to promote democratic structures and environmental sustainability.

In ‘Thinking Globally and Thinking Locally’, O'Brien provides a framework in which to understand why the principle of subsidiarity helps environmentalists to critique widespread global practices that tend to denigrate the environment, ‘the principle of subsidiarity is based on an assumption that the industrialized world is prone to large scales that remove agency and responsibility from individuals and local communities, and so it calls us to emphasize local communities and the small-scale understandings and solutions that can help us relate to the environments around us’ (O'Brien 2008: 231). The implications of the principle of subsidiarity are twofold for O'Brien. First, it cautions us about the effects of large-scale economic and political practices. As decisions happen further and further away from an individual's community, the more difficult it becomes to have a voice in the decisions that happen, even when those decisions impact the individual's community. The second implication that O'Brien develops from the principle of subsidiarity is that humans can and ought to understand the environment around them. In turn, they have a responsibility to protect and make decisions about the local environment. In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, which acknowledges the interplay between the local and the global, O'Brien emphasizes that solving and preventing environmental problems cannot happen solely at the local level, but that environmentalists must work both at the local level and the global level.

Another example of applying subsidiarity in concrete practice can be found in literature about alternative practices within the criminal justice system. In her article 'Solidarity and Subsidiarity: Complementary Principles of Community Development', Francis J. Schweigert takes the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity and demonstrates the ways in which they already function in community-based victim-offender conferences and further that these terms can help foster respect between communities and public institutions (Schweigert 2002: 33). The victim-offender conferences give a concrete example of the way in which solidarity and subsidiarity works, but Schweigert's analysis of subsidiarity and solidarity is especially helpful as a means by which we can assess what the proper level of control is. First, she uses subsidiarity as a '*limiting principle*'. 'This aspect of subsidiarity is valued in part as a limit to state domination, preventing the state from encroaching on local communities or usurping the rightful role of parents' (*Ibid.*: 39). Further, local control has value according to Schweigert because it 'taps into local relational dynamics' (*Ibid.*). The dynamics already in place facilitate implementation of relationships of care (what Schweigert calls solidarity) because they already take place and do not need to be created or legislated.

Subsidiarity works in Schweigert's analysis because it recognizes both the individual's autonomy and that the individual is part of spheres of social influence. Thus victim-offender conferences work because ordinary give-and-take relationships already exist within the community and these relationships do not rely on the offender's actions. The offender has an opportunity to return to these give-and-take relationships as a part of the conference process. From her analysis, Schweigert draws four conclusions. First, 'community is primarily a functional concept'. Second, 'community in a functional sense is self-generating'. Third, 'communities do not exist as discrete social entities, but as a cluster of families and as a part of a larger society'. Fourth, 'care and accountability are mutually reinforcing, each generating more of the other' (*Ibid.*: 42–43). In this analysis, that which is legislated and supported beyond the community is that which already exists. In order to define what constitutes a particular community, an abstract set of definitions will not work. Instead, the definition will come from the relationships of care and accountability that already take place; in some instances care may be more visible or developed than accountability, and vice versa, but where one is present the other can be fostered.

The advantages of Schweigert's conclusions are that community is dynamic, it allows for questioning what constitutes a community and redefining what a community is. Also, it recognizes that communities have a give-and-take nature; people in a community care for each other and hold each other accountable. Finally, Schweigert situates community between smaller units (clusters of families) and larger units (larger society). She provides a flexible definition in which the units within which a community's function can also be questioned, defined, and redefined depending on the issue to which one is responding.

Subsidiarity in Theory and Practice

The advantage of using subsidiarity as an organizing principle for addressing the relationships between individuals, communities, and globalization is that it provides a way

to negotiate between two values that might otherwise conflict: autonomy and interdependence. While institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church hold autonomy as a metaphysical principle guaranteed by God, autonomy cannot be taken as a universal value held by all people in all cultures. Nevertheless, autonomy has been accepted as a common value within the UNUDHR, which gives it enough global credibility to make it worthwhile to try and negotiate between the individual and the global. Interdependence, whether accepted as part of religious belief or an accidental material development, has a global applicability that is apparent at every level. Humans within a community are interdependent, humans between communities are interdependent, and any individual human or community is interdependent with the environment. Since subsidiarity does not prescribe rules that we must always apply but affirms a preference for the local over the global, it provides a check that we can use to continuously question how we interact, and whether we can withdraw our cooperation from the global in order to establish more control locally. Hence, I have come to understand Dennis' nostalgia for the local donut shop as more than just a snide rejection of the possibility of world peace. Rather, the local donut shop can be a concrete symbol of weariness with the monotony of globalization and a desire to have more local control.

NOTE

[1] The principle of subsidiarity is in Article 5 of the Treaty of Maastricht; this treaty establishes economic, social, and citizenship relations between countries that are part of the European Union.

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