



IS BENEDICT THE NEW "SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC" HERO?

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On February 17 the Italian newspaper: "L'Unità" (the official Democratic Party and already former communist newspaper) published an interesting article by the Hon. Stefano Fassina (responsible for the economical department of the Italian Democratic Party), eloquently entitled: "Catholic thinking can help to defeat liberalism." The author calls for a fruitful encounter between social democratic culture and the social doctrine of the Church, in order to overcome liberalism. If I have decided to take part in this debate is because I read the reply by Hon. Stefano Ceccanti, published by "Europe" newspaper on February 19, entitled: "The Fassina's errors." Ceccanti, in his replication, which I agree, disputes the "exceeded backwards" advocated by Fassina and emphasizes the originality of the social teaching of Pope Benedict XVI, because of its encounter with liberalism and not his refusal. In this way, I would like to point up a line of interpretation to propose to Hon. Fassina.

Having said that, like the other magisterial documents, the encyclical "Caritas in veritate" by Benedict XVI, does not want to be a treatise on economics, but a pastoral-theological document, whose arguments are at the junction point between the social sciences and Christian anthropology that judges and joins them, the Church's social doctrine becomes related to the social sciences and aims at connecting them around this anthropology. The concept of market discussed by Benedict XVI is in many respects rather close to the analysis of one of the fathers of the social market economy: the German economist Wilhelm Röpke, a classical market-oriented economist, anything but a labourist nor, least of all, a social democrat. From the perspective of "Caritas in veritate", the market is a high form of collaboration among people who do not necessarily share the same goals. The market, therefore, is the social typology of free men who voluntarily "cum-pete" (search-together) to get the best possible result, regarding the allocation of scarce and available goods – that is not available, obviously does not fit and should not enter the logic of market.

Thus, the Benedict perspective, economically, is indeed a new economic world order inspired by the liberal and Christian principle of "subsidiarity," with the happy explication by Benedict as the Christian and liberal principle of "polyarchy" that allows him to propose a global governance, rather than a government of the world: he wrote about "moderamen globalizationis" and not "gubernaculum globalizationis."

In short, assuming that Benedict, though indirectly, and not necessarily intentionally, seem to refer to the notion of order and law system as they emerge from the German "ordo-liberal" tradition before, and the social market economy after, we shall find accepted the principle of competition as a matter of "common good," to promote and defend against public and private monopolistic trend and not a necessary evil to tame, to guide and to direct.

Far from any dogmatic logic, Benedict XVI seems to repeat that there is no "naked and raw market." Source of criticism of Benedict is the materialistic reductionism that ends up denying the integral dimension of human development in favor of the idea of economy and economic development, viewed purely from an engineering standpoint: this can bring together laissez-fairists and social democrats. Benedict tells us that economy and development are authentic if they contribute to the development of the person. And hence to its qualitative as well as quantitatively character.

Benedict XVI sets out an economic point of view under which the economic activities, like any other dimension of human action, not ever realize themselves in a moral vacuum or in a virtual world, but within a cultural context, whose matrices can be recognized, appreciated or neglected and despised. In this perspective, the economic profile of "Caritas in veritate" meets either the pivot theory of social market economy in its Röpkeian matrix, and the Catholic and liberal tradition of Luigi Sturzo and Luigi Einaudi.

Notwithstanding the refusal of any confusion between the plane of the social doctrine of the Church and that of social theories, it would be a source of great satisfaction to know that the ranks of the advocates of social market economy and Sturzian and Einaudian liberal and Catholic tradition now can count on support from the Hon. Fassina.