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This two-volume work is the first installment in a projected series by members of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists, whose membership criteria include “fidelity to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church in all it teaches including, and especially, her social teachings – always distinguishing between positions asserted in the social encyclicals which are morally obligatory and those which are not and allowing for legitimate differences in views about their applications – and teachings on conjugal morality and family life, such as the important encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.” Volume One, some of it in notably small font, collects the author’s “writings over the past twenty-five years.” (xiii). These forty-five essays, the Foreword by Joseph Varacalli, Ph.D., explains, were written during a period of “captivity of the Catholic Church in the United States by a religiously heterodox ‘new Catholic knowledge class’ composed of progressive intellectuals, activists, and bureaucrats – made possible by a weak and ineffective ecclesiastical leadership . . . .” (xi) Volume Two is a medley comprised of documents (e.g., encyclicals such as *Libertas praestantissimum* and *Pacem in Terris*, Lincoln’s Second Inaugural, and a speech by Senator Jesse Helms), excerpts from classical sources (e.g., Aristotle and Cicero), and U.S. Supreme Court opinions (e.g., *Roe v. Wade, Wisconsin v. Yoder*, and *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*). Volume One is divided into three parts. Part I is titled “Foundational Principles,” and includes essays on such topics as “good political order” and “papal teachings on the family, the state, and the social question.” Part II, “Contemporary Problems,” accounts for most of volume, and is subdivided into ten sections on such topics as human life and family, church-state relations, economics, education, free speech and pornography, health care, international politics and the military, the legal profession, liberalism and conservatism, and “the therapeutic state.” Part III, “Reflections on the Restoration of Culture, Politics, and the Catholic Church in America,” takes up such topics as culture wars, constitutional interpretation and unenumerated rights, abortion, statesmanship, subsidiarity, and a “civilization of love.” With respect to the last topic, it is unfortunate that Krason says nothing whatsoever about Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical *Deus caritas est* (2006), although he does make space to mention Pope Benedict’s 2007 “support” for an archbishop’s excommunicating a Mexican mayor after he signed a bill legalizing abortion. (45 n.26)

Needless to say, this is an eccentric work (which is not to say anything pejorative about the content of the work), and it is not obvious who would buy it. Every single item in Volume II is interesting, but cumulatively the contents correspond to no particular research agenda, only Professor Krason’s favorite texts on important topics. As for Volume I, those who are interested in Krason on pretty much anything at all will now have it all in one place, and that is indeed a service, especially because many of the pieces were first published in quite obscure venues. Krason’s original work is generally insightful, learned, and dogged. It is also bold. Krason takes on Michael Novak on *Centesimus annus*, for example. (259-66) And when Krason asks what the restoration of “the American proposition” (to which John Courtney Murray said the nation was once
dedicated) requires in today’s degraded culture, he answers in the words of Charles Rice: “in the nature of things, th[e] interpreter of [the divine law] has to be the pope.” (129) I happen to agree with Krason that “public philosophers alone” are not equal to the task. (129)

Though Krason is generally a steady expositor of Catholic social doctrine, there are exceptions. As an example of the latter, I would single out subsidiarity, a concept that Krason rightly returns to over and over. Subsidiarity is indeed one of the pillars of Catholic social doctrine, as the popes have made sure since at least the time of Leo XIII. Krason repeatedly quotes the now-classic and definitive formulation of the principle in Quadragesimo anno. (E.g., 9, 37, 312 380, 633). When Krason expounds the principle, however, he gives it a meaning that is not, I think, the one Pope Pius XI and his successors have given it. Specifically, though he uses the word “principle,” Krason in effect claims that subsidiarity is a normative policy of “devolution” (312-13) or of performing social functions at the lowest possible level. (642). It even sometimes appears to be policy in favor of less government and fewer laws: “Legislation should be formulated only when absolutely needed; indeed, the principle of subsidiarity would seem to indicate that.” (678)

Common though these views of subsidiarity may be, for example in discussions of federalism or neo-conservative political theory, none of them approximates the magisterial one. In Catholic social doctrine, subsidiarity is not a policy at all. It is the principle that social functions are to be performed in their proper places. This proposition, that there are social propria, presupposes an ontology of social forms. In the modern world, it is this ontology that needs explicating and defending if subsidiarity is to do the work that the Church asks it to do, for this is what is denied by those who would violate the liberty of the Church or attempt to give new form to marriage and the family. This is not work Krason has undertaken here.

One final question is why “legislation should be formulated only when absolutely needed?” Is this a principle of Catholic social doctrine? I search the magisterial documents in vain in an attempt to locate it there. St. Thomas Aquinas, for his part, discerns a great and necessary good in the legislator’s moving the multitude to the common good through legislation.

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