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Paul Ryan's 'solidarity' and 'subsidiarity' in Catholic social teaching

Mary Ann McGivern | Oct. 3, 2012 NCR Today

On June 4, *America* magazine published a thorough examination [1] of Congressman Paul Ryan's use of the terms "solidarity" and "subsidiarity" as Catholic social teaching.

I'm a little behind in my reading, so I only just got around to it. It was well worth keeping on my "to read" list. "What Ryan Missed" [1] by Gerald J. Beyer runs 2,000 words. Beyer looks at what Ryan says; what his budget proposes; and what the popes say. He says Ryan missed the boat.

It is terrific to review what "solidarity" includes in the teaching of John XXIII, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Beyer says solidarity is not only the human interdependence that Ryan talks about. It is also an ethical imperative and a principle made concrete in public policy and institutions.

About "subsidiarity," Beyer essentially says the church does not expect the poor to solve their own problems, and while individuals have an obligation to give to charity, the church recognizes that government has a significant obligation to ensure both that the poor are fed and that they are treated justly.

One of the severe criticisms my Nuns on the Bus blogs have received is that I should be speaking about the evils of abortion, not the evils of Ryan's budget, even scoffing at one woman's statement that poverty is a cause of abortion. But I think of Jesus saying, "Woe to you experts in the law because you load persons down with burdens they can hardly carry" (Luke 11:46 and Matthew 23:4).

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Links:
[1] http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=13455