

CHAPTER FOUR

PRINCIPLES OF THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL DOCTRINE

I. MEANING AND UNITY

160. *The permanent principles of the Church's social doctrine*³⁴¹ constitute the very heart of Catholic social teaching. These are the principles of: the dignity of the human person, which has already been dealt with in the preceding chapter, and which is the foundation of all the other principles and content of the Church's social doctrine;³⁴² the common good; subsidiarity; and solidarity. These principles, the expression of the whole truth about man known by reason and faith, are born of "the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarized in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbor in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society."³⁴³ In the course of history and with the light of the Spirit, the Church has wisely reflected within her own tradition of faith and has been able to provide an ever more accurate foundation and shape to these principles, progressively explaining them in the attempt to respond coherently to the demands of the times and to the continuous developments of social life.

161. *These are principles of a general and fundamental character, since they concern the reality of society in its entirety:* from close and immediate relationships to those mediated by politics, economics and law; from relationships among communities and groups to relations between peoples and nations. Because of their *permanence in time* and their *universality of meaning*, the Church presents them as the primary and fundamental parameters of reference for interpreting and evaluating social phenomena, which is the necessary source for working out the criteria for the discernment and orientation of social interactions in every area.

162. *The principles of the Church's social doctrine must be appreciated in their unity, interrelatedness and articulation.* This requirement is rooted in the meaning that the Church herself attributes to her social doctrine, as a unified doctrinal corpus that interprets modern social realities in a systematic manner.³⁴⁴ Examining each of these principles individually must not lead to using them only in part or in an

³⁴¹ Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, 29-42, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome 1988, pp. 35-43.

³⁴² Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 453.

³⁴³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia*, 72: AAS 79 (1987), 585.

³⁴⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1 AAS 80 (1988), 513-514.

erroneous manner, which would be the case if they were to be invoked in a disjointed and unconnected way with respect to each of the others. A deep theoretical understanding and the actual application of even just one of these social principles clearly shows the reciprocity, complementarities and interconnectedness that is part of their structure. These fundamental principles of the Church's social doctrine, moreover, represent much more than a permanent legacy of reflection, which is also an essential part of the Christian message, since they indicate the paths possible for building a good, authentic and renewed social life.³⁴⁵

163. *The principles of the social doctrine, in their entirety, constitute that primary articulation of the truth of society by which every conscience is challenged and invited to interact with every other conscience in truth, in responsibility shared fully with all people and also regarding all people. In fact, man cannot avoid the question of freedom and of the meaning of life in society, since society is a reality that is neither external nor foreign to his being.*

These principles have a profoundly moral significance because they refer to the ultimate and organizational foundations of life in society. To understand them completely it is necessary to act in accordance with them, following the path of development that they indicate for a life worthy of man. The ethical requirement inherent in these pre-eminent social principles concerns both the personal behavior of individuals — in that they are the first and indispensable responsible subjects of social life at every level — and at the same time institutions represented by laws, customary norms and civil constructs, because of their capacity to influence and condition the choices of many people over a long period of time. In fact, these principles remind us that the origins of a society existing in history are found in the interconnectedness of the freedoms of all the persons who interact within it, contributing by means of their choices either to build it up or to impoverish it.

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF THE COMMON GOOD

a. Meaning and primary implications

164. *The principle of the common good, to which every aspect of social life must be related if it is to attain its fullest meaning, stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people. According to its primary and broadly accepted sense, the common good indicates "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily."*³⁴⁶

The common good does not consist in the simple sum of the particular goods of each subject of a social entity. Belonging to everyone and to each person, it is and remains "common," because it is indivisible and because only together is it possible to

³⁴⁵ Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, 47, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome 1988, p. 47.

³⁴⁶ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 26: AAS 58 (1966), 1046; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1905-1912; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 417-421; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 272-273; Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 46: AAS 63 (1971), 433-435.

attain it, increase it and safeguard its effectiveness, with regard also to the future. Just as the moral actions of an individual are accomplished in doing what is good, so too the actions of a society attain their full stature when they bring about the common good. The common good, in fact, can be understood as the social and community dimension of the moral good.

165. A society that wishes and intends to remain at the service of the human being at every level is a society that has the common good — the good of all people and of the whole person³⁴⁷ — as its primary goal. The human person cannot find fulfilment in himself, that is, apart from the fact that he exists "with" others and "for" others. This truth does not simply require that he live with others at various levels of social life, but that he seek unceasingly — in actual practice and not merely at the level of ideas — the good, that is, the meaning and truth, found in existing forms of social life. No expression of social life — from the family to intermediate social groups, associations, enterprises of an economic nature, cities, regions, States, up to the community of peoples and nations — can escape the issue of its own common good, in that this is a constitutive element of its significance and the authentic reason for its very existence.³⁴⁸

b. Responsibility of everyone for the common good

166. The demands of the common good are dependent on the social conditions of each historical period and are strictly connected to respect for and the integral promotion of the person and his fundamental rights.³⁴⁹ These demands concern above all the commitment to peace, the organization of the State's powers, a sound juridical system, the protection of the environment, and the provision of essential services to all, some of which are at the same time human rights: food, housing, work, education and access to culture, transportation, basic health care, the freedom of communication and expression, and the protection of religious freedom.³⁵⁰ Nor must one forget the contribution that every nation is required in duty to make towards a true worldwide cooperation for the common good of the whole of humanity and for future generations also.³⁵¹

167. The common good therefore involves all members of society, no one is exempt from cooperating, according to each one's possibilities, in attaining it and developing it.³⁵² The common good must be served in its fullness, not according to reductionist visions that are subordinated by certain people to their advantages; own rather it is to be based on a logic that leads to the assumption of greater responsibility. The com-

³⁴⁷ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1912.

³⁴⁸ Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 272.

³⁴⁹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1907.

³⁵⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 26: AAS 58 (1966), 1046-1047.

³⁵¹ Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 421.

³⁵² Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 417; Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 46: AAS 63 (1971), 433-435; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1913.

mon good corresponds to the highest of human instincts,³⁵³ but it is a good that is very difficult to attain because it requires the constant ability and effort to seek the good of others as though it were one's own good.

Everyone also has the right to enjoy the conditions of social life that are brought about by the quest for the common good. The teaching of Pope Pius XI is still relevant: "the distribution of created goods, which, as every discerning person knows, is laboring today under the gravest evils due to the huge disparity between the few exceedingly rich and the unnumbered propertyless, must be effectively called back to and brought into conformity with the norms of the common good, that is, social justice."³⁵⁴

c. Tasks of the political community

168. *The responsibility for attaining the common good, besides falling to individual persons, belongs also to the State, since the common good is the reason that the political authority exists.*³⁵⁵ The State, in fact, must guarantee the coherency, unity and organization of the civil society of which it is an expression,³⁵⁶ in order that the common good may be attained with the contribution of every citizen. The individual person, the family or intermediate groups are not able to achieve their full development by themselves for living a truly human life. Hence the necessity of political institutions, the purpose of which is to make available to persons the necessary material, cultural, moral and spiritual goods. The goal of life in society is in fact the historically attainable common good.³⁵⁷

169. *To ensure the common good, the government of each country has the specific duty to harmonize the different sectoral interests with the requirements of justice.*³⁵⁸ The proper reconciling of the particular goods of groups and those of individuals is, in fact, one of the most delicate tasks of public authority. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that in the democratic State, where decisions are usually made by the majority of representatives elected by the people, those responsible for government are required to interpret the common good of their country not only according to the guidelines of the majority but also according to the effective good of all the members of the community, including the minority.

³⁵³ Saint Thomas Aquinas places "knowledge of the truth about God" and "life in society" at the highest and most specific level of man's "*inclinationes naturales*" (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2: Ed. Leon. 7, 170: "Secundum igitur ordinem inclinationum naturalium est ordo praeceptorum legis naturae . . . Tertio modo inest homini inclinatio ad bonum secundum naturam rationis, quae est sibi propria; sicut homo habet naturalem inclinationem ad hoc quod veritatem cognoscat de Deo, et ad hoc quod in societate vivat").

³⁵⁴ Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931), 197.

³⁵⁵ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1910.

³⁵⁶ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 74: AAS 58 (1966), 1095-1097; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 17: AAS 71 (1979), 295-300.

³⁵⁷ Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: *Acta Leonis XIII*, 11 (1892), 133-135; Pius XII, Radio Message for the fiftieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*: AAS 33 (1941), 200.

³⁵⁸ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1908.

170. *The common good of society is not an end in itself; it has value only in reference to attaining the ultimate ends of the person and the universal common good of the whole of creation.* God is the ultimate end of his creatures and for no reason may the common good be deprived of its transcendent dimension, which moves beyond the historical dimension while at the same time fulfilling it.³⁵⁹ This perspective reaches its fullness by virtue of faith in Jesus' Passover, which sheds clear light on the attainment of humanity's true common good. Our history — the personal and collective effort to elevate the human condition — begins and ends in Jesus: thanks to him, by means of him and in light of him every reality, including human society, can be brought to its Supreme Good, to its fulfilment. A purely historical and materialistic vision would end up transforming the common good into a simple *socio-economic well-being*, without any transcendental goal, that is, without its most intimate reason for existing.

III. THE UNIVERSAL DESTINATION OF GOODS

a. Origin and meaning

171. *Among the numerous implications of the common good, immediate significance is taken on by the principle of the universal destination of goods:* "God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity."³⁶⁰ This principle is based on the fact that "the original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and man, and who gave the earth to man so that he might have dominion over it by his work and enjoy its fruits (Gen 1:28-29). God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone. This is the *foundation of the universal destination of the earth's goods*. The earth, by reason of its fruitfulness and its capacity to satisfy human needs, is God's first gift for the sustenance of human life."³⁶¹ The human person cannot do without the material goods that correspond to his primary needs and constitute the basic conditions for his existence; these goods are absolutely indispensable if he is to feed himself, grow, communicate, associate with others, and attain the highest purposes to which he is called.³⁶²

172. *The universal right to use the goods of the earth is based on the principle of the universal destination of goods.* Each person must have access to the level of well-being necessary for his full development. The right to the common use of goods is the "first principle of the whole ethical and social order"³⁶³ and "the characteristic

³⁵⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 41: AAS 83 (1991), 843-845.

³⁶⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 69: AAS 58 (1966), 1090.

³⁶¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 31: AAS 83 (1991), 831.

³⁶² Cf. Pius XII, Radio Message for the fiftieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*: AAS 33 (1941), 199-200.

³⁶³ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 19: AAS 73 (1981), 525.

principle of Christian social doctrine."³⁶⁴ For this reason the Church feels bound in duty to specify the nature and characteristics of this principle. It is first of all a *natural* right, inscribed in human nature and not merely a positive right connected with changing historical circumstances; moreover it is an "inherent" ³⁶⁵ right. It is innate in individual persons, in every person, and has *priority* with regard to any human intervention concerning goods, to any legal system concerning the same, to any economic or social system or method: "All other rights, whatever they are, including property rights and the right of free trade must be subordinated to this norm [the universal destination of goods]; they must not hinder it, but must rather expedite its application. It must be considered a serious and urgent social obligation to refer these rights to their original purpose."³⁶⁶

173. *Putting the principal of the universal destination of goods into concrete practice, according to the different cultural and social contexts, means that methods, limits and objects must be precisely defined.* Universal destination and utilization of goods do not mean that everything is at the disposal of each person or of all people, or that the same object may be useful or belong to each person or all people. If it is true that everyone is born with the right to use the goods of the earth, it is likewise true that, in order to ensure that this right is exercised in an equitable and orderly fashion, regulated interventions are necessary, interventions that are the result of national and international agreements, and a juridical order that adjudicates and specifies the exercise of this right.

174. *The principle of the universal destination of goods is an invitation to develop an economic vision inspired by moral values that permit people not to lose sight of the origin or purpose of these goods, so as to bring about a world of fairness and solidarity, in which the creation of wealth can take on a positive function.* Wealth, in effect, presents this possibility in the many different forms in which it can find expression as the result of a process of production that works with the available technological and economic resources, both natural and derived. This result is guided by resourcefulness, planning and labor, and used as a means for promoting the well-being of all men and all peoples and for preventing their exclusion and exploitation.

175. *The universal destination of goods requires a common effort to obtain for every person and for all peoples the conditions necessary for integral development, so that everyone can contribute to making a more humane world, "in which each individual can give and receive, and in which the progress of some will no longer be an obstacle to the development of others, nor a pretext for their enslavement."*³⁶⁷ This principle corresponds to the call made unceasingly by the Gospel to people and societies of all times, tempted as they always are by the desire to possess, temptations which the Lord Jesus chose to undergo (cf. Mk 1:12-13; Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13) in order to teach us how to overcome them with his grace.

³⁶⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42: AAS 80 (1988), 573.

³⁶⁵ Pius XII, Radio Message for the fiftieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*: AAS 33 (1941), 199.

³⁶⁶ Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 22: AAS 59 (1967), 268.

³⁶⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Libertatis Conscientia*, 90: AAS 79 (1987), 594.

b. The universal destination of goods and private property

176. By means of work and making use of the gift of intelligence, people are able to exercise dominion over the earth and make it a fitting home: "In this way, he makes part of the earth his own, precisely the part which he has acquired through work; this is the origin of individual property."³⁶⁸ Private property and other forms of private ownership of goods "assure a person a highly necessary sphere for the exercise of his personal and family autonomy and ought to be considered as an extension of human freedom . . . stimulating exercise of responsibility, it constitutes one of the conditions for civil liberty."³⁶⁹ Private property is an essential element of an authentically social and democratic economic policy, and it is the guarantee of a correct social order. *The Church's social doctrine requires that ownership of goods be equally accessible to all,*³⁷⁰ so that all may become, at least in some measure, owners, and it excludes recourse to forms of "common and promiscuous dominion."³⁷¹

177. Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute and untouchable: "On the contrary, it has always understood this right within the broader context of the right common to all to use the goods of the whole of creation: the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone."³⁷² The principle of the universal destination of goods is an affirmation both of God's full and perennial lordship over every reality and of the requirement that the goods of creation remain ever destined to the development of the whole person and of all humanity.³⁷³ This principle is not opposed to the right to private property³⁷⁴ but indicates the need to regulate it. *Private property, in fact, regardless of the concrete forms of the regulations and juridical norms relative to it, is in its essence only an instrument for respecting the principle of the universal destination of goods; in the final analysis, therefore, it is not an end but a means.*³⁷⁵

178. The Church's social teaching moreover calls for recognition of the social function of any form of private ownership³⁷⁶ that clearly refers to its necessary relation to the common good.³⁷⁷ Man "should regard the external things that he legitimately

³⁶⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 31: AAS 83 (1991), 832.

³⁶⁹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 71: AAS 58 (1966), 1092-1093; cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: *Acta Leonis XIII*, 11 (1892), 103-104; Pius XII, Radio Message for the fiftieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*: AAS 33 (1941), 199; Pius XII, Radio Message of 24 December 1942: AAS 35 (1943), 17; Pius XII, Radio Message of 1 September 1944: AAS 36 (1944), 253; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 428-429.

³⁷⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 6: AAS 83 (1991), 800-801.

³⁷¹ Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: *Acta Leonis XIII*, 11 (1892), 102.

³⁷² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 14: AAS 73 (1981), 613.

³⁷³ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 69: AAS 58 (1966), 1090-1092; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2402-2406.

³⁷⁴ Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: *Acta Leonis XIII*, 11 (1892), 102.

³⁷⁵ Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 22-23: AAS 59 (1967), 268-269.

³⁷⁶ Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 430-431; John Paul II, Address to the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Puebla, Mexico (28 January 1979), III/4: AAS 71 (1979), 199-201.

³⁷⁷ Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931), 191-192, 193-194, 196-197.

possesses not only as his own but also as common in the sense that they should be able to benefit not only him but also others."³⁷⁸ *The universal destination of goods entails obligations on how goods are to be used by their legitimate owners.* Individual persons may not use their resources without considering the effects that this use will have, rather they must act in a way that benefits not only themselves and their family but also the common good. From this there arises the duty on the part of owners not to let the goods in their possession go idle and to channel them to productive activity, even entrusting them to others who are desirous and capable of putting them to use in production.

179. *The present historical period has placed at the disposal of society new goods that were completely unknown until recent times. This calls for a fresh reading of the principle of the universal destination of the goods of the earth and makes it necessary to extend this principle so that it includes the latest developments brought about by economic and technological progress. The ownership of these new goods — the results of knowledge, technology and know-how — becomes ever more decisive, because "the wealth of the industrialized nations is based much more on this kind of ownership than on natural resources."*³⁷⁹

New technological and scientific knowledge must be placed at the service of mankind's primary needs, gradually increasing humanity's common patrimony. Putting the principle of the universal destination of goods into full effect therefore requires action at the international level and planned programmes on the part of all countries. "It is necessary to break down the barriers and monopolies which leave so many countries on the margins of development, and to provide all individuals and nations with the basic conditions which will enable them to share in development."³⁸⁰

180. *If forms of property unknown in the past take on significant importance in the process of economic and social development, nonetheless, traditional forms of property must not be forgotten. Individual property is not the only legitimate form of ownership. The ancient form of community property also has a particular importance; though it can be found in economically advanced countries, it is particularly characteristic of the social structure of many indigenous peoples. This is a form of property that has such a profound impact on the economic, cultural and political life of those peoples that it constitutes a fundamental element of their survival and well-being. The defence and appreciation of community property must not exclude, however, an awareness of the fact that this type of property also is destined to evolve. If actions were taken only to preserve its present form, there would be the risk of tying it to the past and in this way compromising it.*³⁸¹

An equitable distribution of land remains ever critical, especially in developing countries and in countries that have recently changed from systems based on collectiv-

³⁷⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 69: AAS 58 (1966): 1090.

³⁷⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 32: AAS 83 (1991), 832.

³⁸⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 35: AAS 83 (1991), 837.

³⁸¹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 69: AAS 58 (1966), 1090-1092.

ties or colonization.³⁸² In rural areas, the possibility of acquiring land through opportunities offered by labor and credit markets is a necessary condition for access to other goods and services. Besides constituting an effective means for safeguarding the environment, this possibility represents a system of social security that can be put in place also in those countries with a weak administrative structure.

181. *To the subjects, whether individuals or communities, that exercise ownership of various types of property accrue a series of objective advantages: better living conditions, security for the future, and a greater number of options from which to choose. On the other hand, property may also bring a series of deceptive promises that are a source of temptation.* Those people and societies that go so far as to absolutize the role of property end up experiencing the bitterest type of slavery. In fact, there is no category of possession that can be considered indifferent with regard to the influence that it may have both on individuals and on institutions. Owners who heedlessly idolize their goods (cf. Mt 6:24, 19:21-26; Lk 16:13) become owned and enslaved by them.³⁸³ Only by recognizing that these goods are dependent on God the Creator and then directing their use to the common good, is it possible to give material goods their proper function as useful tools for the growth of individuals and peoples.

c. The universal destination of goods and the preferential option for the poor

182. *The principle of the universal destination of goods requires that the poor, the marginalized and in all cases those whose living conditions interfere with their proper growth should be the focus of particular concern. To this end, the preferential option for the poor should be reaffirmed in all its force.*³⁸⁴ "This is an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness. It affects the life of each Christian inasmuch as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our social responsibilities and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning the ownership and use of goods. Today, furthermore, given the worldwide dimension which the social question has assumed, this love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without health care and, above all, those without hope of a better future."³⁸⁵

³⁸² Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Towards a Better Distribution of Land. The Challenge of Agrarian Reform* (23 November 1997), 27-31: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1997, pp. 28-31.

³⁸³ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 27-34, 37: AAS 80 (1988), 547-560, 563-564; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 41: AAS 83 (1991), 843-845.

³⁸⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Puebla, Mexico (28 January 1979), I/8: AAS 71 (1979), 194-195.

³⁸⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42: AAS 80 (1988), 572-573; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, 32: AAS 87 (1995), 436-437; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 51: AAS 87 (1995), 36; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 49-50: AAS 93 (2001), 302-303.

183. *Human misery is a clear sign of man's natural condition of frailty and of his need for salvation.*³⁸⁶ Christ the Savior showed compassion in this regard, identifying himself with the "least" among men (cf. Mt 25:40,45). "It is by what they have done for the poor that Jesus Christ will recognize his chosen ones. When 'the poor have the good news preached to them' (Mt 11:5), it is a sign of Christ's presence."³⁸⁷

Jesus says: "You always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me" (Mt 26:11; cf. Mk 14:7; Jn 12:8). He makes this statement not to contrast the attention due to him with service of the poor. Christian realism, while appreciating on the one hand the praiseworthy efforts being made to defeat poverty, is cautious on the other hand regarding ideological positions and Messianistic beliefs that sustain the illusion that it is possible to eliminate the problem of poverty completely from this world. This will happen only upon Christ's return, when he will be with us once more, for ever. In the meantime, *the poor remain entrusted to us and it is this responsibility upon which we shall be judged at the end of time* (cf. Mt 25:31-46): "Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren."³⁸⁸

184. *The Church's love for the poor is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, by the poverty of Jesus and by his attention to the poor. This love concerns material poverty and also the numerous forms of cultural and religious poverty.*³⁸⁹ The Church, "since her origin and in spite of the failing of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defence and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere."³⁹⁰ Prompted by the Gospel injunction, "You have received without paying, give without pay" (Mt 10:8), the Church teaches that one should assist one's fellow man in his various needs and fills the human community with countless *works of corporal and spiritual mercy*. "Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God,"³⁹¹ even if the practice of charity is not limited to alms-giving but implies addressing the social and political dimensions of the problem of poverty. In her teaching the Church constantly returns to this relationship between charity and justice: "When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice."³⁹² The Council Fathers strongly recommended that this duty be fulfilled correctly, remembering that "what is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity."³⁹³ Love for the poor is certainly "incompatible with immoderate love of riches or their selfish use"³⁹⁴ (cf. Jas 5:1-6).

³⁸⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2448.

³⁸⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2443.

³⁸⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1033.

³⁸⁹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2444.

³⁹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2448.

³⁹¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2447.

³⁹² Saint Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis*, 3, 21: PL 77, 87: "Nam cum qualibet necessaria indigentibus ministramus, sua illis reddimus, non nostra largimur; iustitiae potius debitum soluimus, quam misericordiae opera implemus."

³⁹³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8: AAS 58 (1966), 845; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2446.

³⁹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2445.

IV. THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY

a. Origin and meaning

185. *Subsidiarity is among the most constant and characteristic directives of the Church's social doctrine and has been present since the first great social encyclical.*³⁹⁵ It is impossible to promote the dignity of the person without showing concern for the family, groups, associations, local territorial realities; in short, for that aggregate of economic, social, cultural, sports-oriented, recreational, professional and political expressions to which people spontaneously give life and which make it possible for them to achieve effective social growth.³⁹⁶ This is the realm of *civil society*, understood as the sum of the relationships between individuals and intermediate social groupings, which are the first relationships to arise and which come about thanks to "the creative subjectivity of the citizen."³⁹⁷ This network of relationships strengthens the social fabric and constitutes the basis of a true community of persons, making possible the recognition of higher forms of social activity.³⁹⁸

186. *The necessity of defending and promoting the original expressions of social life is emphasized by the Church in the Encyclical Quadragesimo Anno, in which the principle of subsidiarity is indicated as a most important principle of "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. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them."³⁹⁹

On the basis of this principle, all societies of a superior order must adopt attitudes of help ("subsidium") — therefore of support, promotion, development — with respect to lower-order societies. In this way, intermediate social entities can properly perform the functions that fall to them without being required to hand them over unjustly to other social entities of a higher level, by which they would end up being absorbed and substituted, in the end seeing themselves denied their dignity and essential place.

Subsidiarity, understood in the positive sense as economic, institutional or juridical assistance offered to lesser social entities, entails a corresponding series

³⁹⁵ Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*: *Acta Leonis XIII*, 11 (1892), 101-102, 123.

³⁹⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1882.

³⁹⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 15: AAS 80 (1988), 529; cf. Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931), 203; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 439; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 65: AAS 58 (1966), 1086-1087; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia*, 73, 85-86: AAS 79 (1987), 586, 592-593; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 48: AAS 83 (1991), 852-854; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1883-1885.

³⁹⁸ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 49: AAS 83 (1991), 854-856; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 15: AAS 80 (1988), 528-530.

³⁹⁹ Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931), 203; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 48: AAS 83 (1991), 852-854; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1883.

of negative implications that require the State to refrain from anything that would de facto restrict the existential space of the smaller essential cells of society. Their initiative, freedom and responsibility must not be supplanted.

b. Concrete indications

187. *The principle of subsidiarity protects people from abuses by higher-level social authority and calls on these same authorities to help individuals and intermediate groups to fulfil their duties. This principle is imperative because every person, family and intermediate group has something original to offer to the community.* Experience shows that the denial of subsidiarity, or its limitation in the name of an alleged democratization or equality of all members of society, limits and sometimes even destroys the spirit of freedom and initiative.

The principle of subsidiarity is opposed to certain forms of centralization, bureaucratization, and welfare assistance and to the unjustified and excessive presence of the State in public mechanisms. "By intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility, the Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients, and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending."⁴⁰⁰ An absent or insufficient recognition of private initiative — in economic matters also — and the failure to recognize its public function, contribute to the undermining of the principle of subsidiarity, as monopolies do as well.

In order for the principle of subsidiarity to be put into practice there is a corresponding need for: respect and effective promotion of the human person and the family; ever greater appreciation of associations and intermediate organizations in their fundamental choices and in those that cannot be delegated to or exercised by others; the encouragement of private initiative so that every social entity remains at the service of the common good, each with its own distinctive characteristics; the presence of pluralism in society and due representation of its vital components; safeguarding human rights and the rights of minorities; bringing about bureaucratic and administrative decentralization; striking a balance between the public and private spheres, with the resulting recognition of the social function of the private sphere; appropriate methods for making citizens more responsible in actively "being a part" of the political and social reality of their country.

188. *Various circumstances may make it advisable that the State step in to supply certain functions.*⁴⁰¹ One may think, for example, of situations in which it is necessary for the State itself to stimulate the economy because it is impossible for civil society to support initiatives on its own. One may also envision the reality of serious social imbalance or injustice where only the intervention of the public authority can create conditions of greater equality, justice and peace. In light of the prin-

⁴⁰⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 48: AAS 83 (1991), 854.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 48: AAS 83 (1991), 852-854.

ciple of subsidiarity, however, this institutional substitution must not continue any longer than is absolutely necessary, since justification for such intervention is found only in the *exceptional nature* of the situation. In any case, the common good correctly understood, the demands of which will never in any way be contrary to the defence and promotion of the primacy of the person and the way this is expressed in society, must remain the criteria for making decisions concerning the application of the principle of subsidiarity.

V. PARTICIPATION

a. Meaning and value

189. *The characteristic implication of subsidiarity is participation,⁴⁰² which is expressed essentially in a series of activities by means of which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he belongs.⁴⁰³ Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good.⁴⁰⁴*

This cannot be confined or restricted to only a certain area of social life, given its importance for growth — above all human growth — in areas such as the world of work and economic activity, especially in their internal dynamics;⁴⁰⁵ in the sectors of information and culture; and, more than anything else, in the fields of social and political life even at the highest levels. The cooperation of all peoples and the building of an international community in a framework of solidarity depends on this latter area.⁴⁰⁶ In this perspective it becomes absolutely necessary to encourage participation above all of the most disadvantaged, as well as the occasional rotation of political leaders in order to forestall the establishment of hidden privileges. Moreover, strong moral pressure is needed, so that the administration of public life will be the result of the shared responsibility of each individual with regard to the common good.

b. Participation and democracy

190. *Participation in community life is not only one of the greatest aspirations of the citizen, called to exercise freely and responsibly his civic role with and for others,⁴⁰⁷ but is also one of the pillars of all democratic orders and one of the major guarantees of the*

⁴⁰² Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 22, 46: AAS 63 (1971), 417, 433-435; Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, 40, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome 1988, pp. 41-42.

⁴⁰³ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 75: AAS 58 (1966), 1097-1099.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1913-1917.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 423-425; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 14: AAS 73 (1981), 612-616; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 35: AAS 83 (1991), 836-838.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 44-45: AAS 80 (1988), 575-578.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 278.

permanence of the democratic system. Democratic government, in fact, is defined first of all by the assignment of powers and functions on the part of the people, exercised in their name, in their regard and on their behalf. It is therefore clearly evident that *every democracy must be participative*.⁴⁰⁸ This means that the different subjects of civil community at every level must be informed, listened to and involved in the exercise of the carried-out functions.

191. *Participation can be achieved in all the different relationships between the citizen and institutions: to this end, particular attention must be given to the historical and social contexts in which such participation can truly be brought about.* The overcoming of cultural, juridical and social obstacles that often constitutes real barriers to the *shared participation* of citizens in the destiny of their communities' calls for work in the areas of information and education.⁴⁰⁹ In this regard, all those attitudes that encourage in citizens an inadequate or incorrect practice of participation or that cause widespread disaffection with everything connected with the sphere of social and political life are a source of concern and deserve careful consideration. For example, one thinks of attempts by certain citizens to "make deals" with institutions in order to obtain more advantageous conditions for themselves, as though these institutions were at the service of their selfish needs; or of the practice of citizens to limit their participation to the electoral process, in many cases reaching the point where they even abstain from voting.⁴¹⁰

In the area of participation, a further *source of concern* is found in those countries ruled by totalitarian or dictatorial regimes, where the fundamental right to participate in public life is denied at its origin, since it is considered a threat to the State itself.⁴¹¹ In some countries where this right is only formally proclaimed while in reality it cannot be concretely exercised while, in still other countries the burgeoning bureaucracy *de facto* denies citizens the possibility of taking active part in social and political life.⁴¹²

VI. THE PRINCIPLE OF SOLIDARITY

a. Meaning and value

192. *Solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity.* Never before has there been such a widespread awareness of the *bond of interdependence between individuals and peoples*.

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 46: AAS 83 (1991), 850-851.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1917.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 30-31: AAS 55 (1966), 1049-1050; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 47: AAS 83 (1991), 851-852.

⁴¹¹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 44-45: AAS 83 (1991), 848-849.

⁴¹² Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 15: AAS 80 (1988), 528-530; Pius XII, Christmas Radio Message of 24 December 1952: AAS 45 (1953), 37; Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 47: AAS 63 (1971), 435-437.

which is found at every level.⁴¹³ The very rapid expansion in ways and means of communication "in real time," such as those offered by information technology, the extraordinary advances in computer technology, the increased volume of commerce and information exchange all bear witness to the fact that, for the first time since the beginning of human history, it is now possible — at least technically — to establish relationships between people who are separated by great distances and are unknown to each other.

*In the presence of the phenomenon of interdependence and its constant expansion, however, there persist in every part of the world stark inequalities between developed and developing countries, inequalities stoked also by various forms of exploitation, oppression and corruption that have a negative influence on the internal and international life of many States. The acceleration of interdependence between persons and peoples needs to be accompanied by equally intense efforts on the ethical-social plane, in order to avoid the dangerous consequences of perpetrating injustice on a global scale. This would have very negative repercussions even in the very countries that are presently more advantaged.*⁴¹⁴

b. Solidarity as a social principle and a moral virtue

193. *The new relationships of interdependence between individuals and peoples, which are de facto forms of solidarity, have to be transformed into relationships tending towards genuine ethical-social solidarity.* This is a moral requirement inherent within all human relationships. Solidarity is seen therefore under two complementary aspects: that of a social principle⁴¹⁵ and that of a moral virtue.⁴¹⁶

Solidarity must be seen above all in its value as a moral virtue that determines the order of institutions. On the basis of this principle the "structures of sin"⁴¹⁷ that dominate relationships between individuals and peoples must be overcome. They must be purified and transformed into *structures of solidarity* through the creation or appropriate modification of laws, market regulations, and juridical systems.

*Solidarity is also an authentic moral virtue, not a "feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. That is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."*⁴¹⁸ Solidarity rises to the rank of fundamental social virtue since it places itself in the sphere of justice. It is a virtue directed *par excellence* to the common good, and is found in "a commitment to the good of one's neighbor

⁴¹³ There can be associated to the concept of interdependence the classical theme of socialization, repeatedly examined by the Church's social doctrine; cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 415-417; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 42: AAS 58 (1966), 1060-1061; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 14-15: AAS 73 (1981), 612-618.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 11-22: AAS 80 (1988), 525-540.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1939-1941.

⁴¹⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1942.

⁴¹⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 36, 37: AAS 80 (1988), 561-564; cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 16: AAS 77 (1985), 213-217.

⁴¹⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38: AAS 80 (1988), 565-566.

with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to 'lose oneself' for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to 'serve him' instead of oppressing him for one's own advantage (cf. Mt 10:40-42, 20:25; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:25-27).⁴¹⁹

c. Solidarity and the common growth of mankind

194. The message of the Church's social doctrine regarding solidarity clearly shows that there exists an intimate bond between solidarity and the common good, between solidarity and the universal destination of goods, between solidarity and equality among men and peoples, between solidarity and peace in the world.⁴²⁰ The term "solidarity," widely used by the Magisterium,⁴²¹ expresses in summary fashion the need to recognize in the composite ties that unite men and social groups among themselves, the space given to human freedom for common growth in which all share and in which they participate. The commitment to this goal is translated into the positive contribution of seeing that nothing is lacking in the common cause and also of seeking points of possible agreement where attitudes of separation and fragmentation prevail. It translates into the willingness to give oneself for the good of one's neighbor, beyond any individual or particular interest.⁴²²

195. The principle of solidarity requires that men and women of our day cultivate a greater awareness that they are debtors of the society of which they have become part. They are debtors because of those conditions that make human existence livable and because of the indivisible and indispensable legacy constituted by culture, sci-

⁴¹⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38: AAS 80 (1988), 566; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 8: AAS 73 (1981), 594-598; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 57: AAS 83 (1991), 862-863.

⁴²⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 17, 39, 45: AAS 80 (1988), 532-533, 566-568, 577-578. International solidarity too is required by the moral order; peace in the world depends in large part on this: cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 83-86: AAS 58 (1966), 1107-1110; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 48: AAS 59 (1967), 281; Pontifical Commission "Iustitia et Pax," *At the Service of the Human Community: an Ethical Approach to the International Debt Question* (27 December 1986), 1, 1, Vatican Polyglot Press, Vatican City 1986, p. 11; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1941, 2435.

⁴²¹ Solidarity, though not yet with that explicit name, is one of the basic principles of *Rerum Novarum* (cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 [1961], 407). "What we nowadays call the principle of solidarity . . . is frequently stated by Pope Leo XIII, who uses the term 'friendship,' a concept already found in Greek philosophy. Pope Pius XI refers to it with the equally meaningful term 'social charity'. Pope Paul VI, expanding the concept to cover the more modern aspects of the social question, speaks of a 'civilization of love'" (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 10: AAS 83 [1991], 805). Solidarity is one of the basic principles of the entire social teaching of the Church (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia*, 73: AAS 79 [1987], 586). Starting with Pius XII (cf. Encyclical Letter *Summi Pontificatus*: AAS 31 [1939], 426-427), the term *solidarity* is used ever more frequently and with ever broader meaning: from that of "law" in the same encyclical to that of "principle" (cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 [1961], 407), that of "duty" (cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 17, 48: AAS 59 [1967], 265-266, 281) and that of "value" (cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38: AAS 80 [1988], 564-566), and finally that of "virtue" (cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38, 42: AAS 80 [1988], 564-566, 568-569).

⁴²² Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, 38, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome 1988, pp. 40-41.

entific and technical knowledge, material and immaterial goods and by all that the human condition has produced. A similar debt must be recognized in the various forms of social interaction, so that humanity's journey will not be interrupted but remain open to present and future generations, all of them called together to share the same gift in solidarity.

d. Solidarity in the life and message of Jesus Christ

196. *The unsurpassed apex of the perspective indicated here is the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the New Man, who is one with humanity even to the point of "death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). In him it is always possible to recognize the living sign of that measureless and transcendent love of God-with-us, who takes on the infirmities of his people, walks with them, saves them and makes them one.*⁴²³ In him and thanks to him, life in society too, despite all its contradictions and ambiguities, can be rediscovered as a place of life and hope, in that it is a sign of grace that is continuously offered to all and because it is an invitation to ever higher and more involved forms of sharing.

*Jesus of Nazareth makes the connection between solidarity and charity shine brightly before all, illuminating the entire meaning of this connection.*⁴²⁴ "In the light of faith, solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the specifically Christian dimensions of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation. One's neighbor is then not only a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but becomes the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit. One's neighbor must therefore be loved, even if an enemy, with the same love with which the Lord loves him or her; and for that person's sake one must be ready for sacrifice, even the ultimate one: to lay down one's life for the brethren (cf. 1 Jn 3:16)." ⁴²⁵

VII. THE FUNDAMENTAL VALUES OF SOCIAL LIFE

a. The relationship between principles and values

197. *Besides the principles that must guide the building of a society worthy of man, the Church's social doctrine also indicates fundamental values.* The relationship between principles and values is undoubtedly one of reciprocity, in that social values are an expression of appreciation to be attributed to those specific aspects of moral good that these principles foster, serving as points of reference for the proper structuring and ordered leading of life in society. These values require, therefore, both the

⁴²³ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 32: AAS 58 (1966), 1051.

⁴²⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 40: AAS 80 (1988), 568: "Solidarity is undoubtedly a *Christian virtue*. In what has been said so far it has been possible to identify many points of contact between solidarity and charity, which is the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples (cf. Jn 13:35)."

⁴²⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 40: AAS 80 (1988), 569.

practice of the fundamental principles of social life and the personal exercise of virtue, hence of those moral attitudes that correspond to these very values.⁴²⁶

All social values are inherent in the dignity of the human person, whose authentic development they foster. Essentially, these values are: truth, freedom, justice, love.⁴²⁷ Putting them into practice is the sure and necessary way of obtaining personal perfection and a more human social existence. They constitute the indispensable point of reference for public authorities, called to carry out "substantial reforms of economic, political, cultural and technological structures and the necessary changes in institutions."⁴²⁸ Respect for the legitimate autonomy of earthly realities prompts the Church not to claim specific competence of a technical or temporal order,⁴²⁹ but it does not prevent her from intervening to show how, in the different choices made by men and women, these values are either affirmed or denied.⁴³⁰

b. Truth

198. Men and women have the specific duty to move always towards the truth, to respect it and bear responsible witness to it.⁴³¹ Living in the truth has special significance in social relationships. In fact, when the coexistence of human beings within a community is founded on truth, it is ordered and fruitful, and it corresponds to their dignity as persons.⁴³² The more people and social groups strive to resolve social problems according to the truth, the more they distance themselves from abuses and act in accordance with the objective demands of morality.

Modern times call for an intensive educational effort⁴³³ and a corresponding commitment on the part of all so that the quest for truth cannot be ascribed to the sum of different opinions, nor to one or another of these opinions — will be encouraged in every sector and will prevail over every attempt to relativize its demands or to offend it.⁴³⁴ This is an issue that involves the world of public communications and that of the economy in a particular way. In these areas, the unscrupulous use of

⁴²⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1886.

⁴²⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 26: AAS 58 (1966), 1046-1047; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 265-266.

⁴²⁸ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, 43, Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome 1988, p. 44.

⁴²⁹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 36: AAS 58 (1966), 1053-1054.

⁴³⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 1: AAS 58 (1966), 1025-1026; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 13: AAS 59 (1967), 263-264.

⁴³¹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2467.

⁴³² Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 265-266, 281.

⁴³³ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 61: AAS 58 (1966), 1081-1082; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 35, 40: AAS 59 (1967), 274-275, 277; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 44: AAS 80 (1988), 575-577. For social reform, "the primary task, which will affect the success of all the others, belongs to the order of education": Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia*, 99: AAS 79 (1987), 599.

⁴³⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 16: AAS 58 (1966), 1037; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2464-2487.

money raises ever more pressing questions, which necessarily call for greater transparency and honesty in personal and social activity.

c. Freedom

199. Freedom is the highest sign in man of his being made in the divine image and, consequently, is a sign of the sublime dignity of every human person.⁴³⁵ "Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings. Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being. All owe to each other this duty of respect. The right to the exercise of freedom, especially in moral and religious matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person."⁴³⁶ The meaning of freedom must not be restricted, considering it from a purely individualistic perspective and reducing it to the arbitrary and uncontrolled exercise of one's own personal autonomy: "Far from being achieved in total self-sufficiency and the absence of relationships, freedom only truly exists where reciprocal bonds, governed by truth and justice, link people to one another."⁴³⁷ The understanding of freedom becomes deeper and broader when it is defended, even at the social level, in all of its various dimensions.

200. The value of freedom, as an expression of the singularity of each human person, is respected when every member of society is permitted to fulfil his personal vocation; to seek the truth and profess his religious, cultural and political ideas; to express his opinions; to choose his state of life and, as far as possible, his line of work; to pursue initiatives of an economic, social or political nature. This must take place within a "strong juridical framework,"⁴³⁸ within the limits imposed by the common good and public order, and, in every case, in a manner characterized by responsibility.

On the other hand, freedom must also be expressed as the capacity to refuse what is morally negative, in whatever guise it may be presented,⁴³⁹ as the capacity to distance oneself effectively from everything that could hinder personal, family or social growth. The fullness of freedom consists in the capacity to be in possession of oneself in view of the genuine good, within the context of the universal common good.⁴⁴⁰

d. Justice

201. Justice is a value that accompanies the exercise of the corresponding cardinal moral virtue.⁴⁴¹ According to its most classic formulation, it "consists in the constant

⁴³⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 17: AAS 58 (1966), 1037-1038; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1705, 1730; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia*, 28: AAS 79 (1987), 565.

⁴³⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1738.

⁴³⁷ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia*, 26: AAS 79 (1987), 564-565.

⁴³⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 42: AAS 83 (1991), 846. This statement is made in the context of economic initiative, but it appears correct to apply it also to other areas of personal activity.

⁴³⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 17: AAS 83 (1991), 814-815.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 289-290.

⁴⁴¹ Cf. Saint Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 6: Ed. Leon. 6, 55-63.

and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor."⁴⁴² From a subjective point of view, justice is translated into behavior that is based on the will to recognize the other as a person, while, from an objective point of view, it constitutes the decisive criteria of morality in the intersubjective and social sphere.⁴⁴³

The Church's social Magisterium constantly calls for the most classical forms of justice to be respected: *commutative, distributive and legal justice*.⁴⁴⁴ Ever greater importance has been given to *social justice*,⁴⁴⁵ which represents a real development in *general justice*, the justice that regulates social relationships according to the criterion of observance of the law. *Social justice*, a requirement related to the *social question* which today is worldwide in scope, concerns the social, political and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions.⁴⁴⁶

202. Justice is particularly important in the present-day context, where the individual value of the person, his dignity and his rights — despite proclaimed intentions — are seriously threatened by the widespread tendency to make exclusive use of criteria of utility and ownership. Justice too, on the basis of these criteria, is considered in a reductionist manner, whereas it acquires a fuller and more authentic meaning in Christian anthropology. Justice, in fact, is not merely a simple human convention, because what is "just" is not first determined by the law but by the profound identity of the human being.⁴⁴⁷

203. The full truth about man makes it possible to move beyond a contractualistic vision of justice, which is a reductionist vision, and to open up also for justice the new horizon of solidarity and love. "By itself, justice is not enough. Indeed, it can even betray itself, unless it is open to that deeper power which is love."⁴⁴⁸ In fact, the Church's social doctrine places alongside the value of justice that of solidarity, in that it is the privileged way of peace. If peace is the fruit of justice, "today one could say, with the same exactness and the same power of biblical inspiration (cf. Is 32:17; Jas 3:18): *Opus solidaritatis pax*, peace as the fruit of solidarity."⁴⁴⁹ The goal of peace, in fact, "will certainly be achieved through the putting into effect of social and international justice, but also through the practice of the virtues which favor togetherness, and which teach us to live in unity, so as to build in unity, by giving and receiving, a new society and a better world."⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1807; cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 58, a. 1; Ed. Leon. 9, 9-10: "iustitia est perpetua et constans voluntas ius suum unicuique tribuendi."

⁴⁴³ Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 282-283.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2411.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1928-1942, 2425-2449, 2832; Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Divini Redemptoris*: AAS 29 (1937), 92.

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, 2: AAS 73 (1981), 580-583.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 40: AAS 80 (1988), 568; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1929.

⁴⁴⁸ John Paul II, Message for the 2004 World Day of Peace, 10: AAS 96 (2004), 121.

⁴⁴⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39: AAS 80 (1988), 568.

⁴⁵⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39: AAS 80 (1988), 568.

VIII. THE WAY OF LOVE

204. *Among the virtues in their entirety, and in particular between virtues, social values and love, there exists a deep bond that must be ever more fully recognized.* Love, often restricted to relationships of physical closeness or limited to merely subjective aspects of action on behalf of others, must be reconsidered in its authentic value as the *highest and universal criterion of the whole of social ethics.* Among all paths, even those sought and taken in order to respond to the ever new forms of current social questions, the "more excellent way" (cf. 1 Cor 12:31) is that *marked out by love.*

205. *It is from the inner wellspring of love that the values of truth, freedom and justice are born and grow.* Human life in society is ordered, bears fruits of goodness and responds to human dignity when it is founded on truth; when it is lived in justice, that is, in the effective respect of rights and in the faithful carrying out of corresponding duties; when it is animated by selflessness, which makes the needs and requirements of others seem as one's own and intensifies the communion of spiritual values and the concern for material necessities; when it is brought about in the freedom that befits the dignity of men and women, prompted by their rational nature to accept responsibility for their actions.⁴⁵¹ These values constitute the pillars which give strength and consistency to the edifice of life and deeds: they are values that determine the quality of every social action and institution.

206. *Love presupposes and transcends justice, which "must find its fulfilment in charity."*⁴⁵² If justice is "in itself suitable for 'arbitration' between people concerning the reciprocal distribution of objective goods in an equitable manner, love and only love (including that kindly love that we call 'mercy') is capable of restoring man to himself."⁴⁵³ *Human relationships cannot be governed solely by the measure of justice:* "The experience of the past and of our own time demonstrates that justice alone is not enough, that it can even lead to the negation and destruction of itself . . . It has been precisely historical experience that, among other things, has led to the formulation of the saying: *summum ius, summa iniuria.*"⁴⁵⁴ In fact, "in every sphere of interpersonal relationships justice must, so to speak, be 'corrected' to a considerable extent by that love which, as St. Paul proclaims, 'is patient and kind' or, in other words, possesses the characteristics of that merciful love which is so much of the essence of the Gospel and Christianity."⁴⁵⁵

207. *No legislation, no system of rules or negotiation will ever succeed in persuading men and peoples to live in unity, brotherhood and peace; no line of reasoning will ever be able to surpass the appeal of love.* Only love, in its quality as "form of the virtues,"⁴⁵⁶ can

⁴⁵¹ Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 265-267.

⁴⁵² John Paul II, Message for the 2004 World Day of Peace, 10: AAS 96 (2004), 120.

⁴⁵³ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 14: AAS 72 (1980), 1223.

⁴⁵⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 12: AAS 72 (1980), 1216.

⁴⁵⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 14: AAS 72 (1980), 1224; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2212.

⁴⁵⁶ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a. 8: Ed. Leon. 8, 72; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1827.

animate and shape social interaction, moving it towards peace in the context of a world that is ever more complex. In order that all this may take place, however, it is necessary that care be taken to show love not only in its role of prompting individual deeds but also as a force capable of inspiring new ways of approaching the problems of today's world, of profoundly renewing structures, social organizations, legal systems from within. In this perspective love takes on the characteristic style of *social and political charity*: "Social charity makes us love the common good,"⁴⁵⁷ it makes us effectively seek the good of all people, considered not only as individuals or private persons but also in the social dimension that unites them.

208. *Social and political charity is not exhausted in relationships between individuals but spreads into the network formed by these relationships, which is precisely the social and political community; it intervenes in this context seeking the greatest good for the community in its entirety. In so many aspects the neighbor to be loved is found "in society," such that to love him concretely, assist him in his needs or in his indigence may mean something different than it means on the mere level of relationships between individuals. To love him on the social level means, depending on the situations to make use of social mediations to improve his life or to remove social factors that cause his indigence. It is undoubtedly an act of love, the work of mercy by which one responds here and now to a real and impelling need of one's neighbor, but it is an equally indispensable act of love to strive to organize and structure society so that one's neighbor will not find himself in poverty, above all when this becomes a situation within which an immense number of people and entire populations must struggle, and when it takes on the proportions of a true worldwide social issue.*

⁴⁵⁷ Paul VI, Address to the Food and Agriculture Association on the twenty-fifth anniversary of its foundation (16 November 1970): *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, vol. VIII, p. 1153.