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The social and economic message of Benedict XVI's Caritas in Veritate in the perspective of the Roman Catholic social doctrine

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Chapter IV – Principles of social doctrine

1. Introduction

The *Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church* lists the principles that are at the basis of the Roman Catholic Church's social doctrine. These are: the *personalist principle* or the dignity of the human person, the *common good*, the *subsidiarity principle*, and the *principle of solidarity*. While analysing them, I will also describe other elements or sub-principles, which are sometimes implied in their content.

Analysing such principles has a twofold utility for us. First, we will see later how Benedict XVI in *Caritas in veritate* expresses, and somewhere develops, some ideas presented in the *Compendium*. The principle of subsidiarity is an example in this sense. Thus, we will observe a theoretical continuity of some elements in *Caritas* with those exposed here. Seeing these principles here, and then in *Caritas*, can also help us reflect upon the process of adaptation of these. We observe that the principles have a long lasting character.¹⁴⁴ The principles of social thought all serve the same aim, the same end. This end is represented by human flourishing. The use principles has to do with the combination of 'continuity and renewal' that has been mentioned before.¹⁴⁵ What is supposed to change or, we could say, to be updated is the method, or the mode in which problems are addressed. There is a sort of translation, in the sense of the rendition or conversion, of such principles according to contemporary situations. Without ignoring that new problems may arise, calling thus for new approaches.

Second, in specific cases it is possible to compare the principles of social teaching with some in the secular field. I am thinking, for example, of the subsidiarity principle and its application in European Union policies, about which there will be occasion to speak again when considering the social doctrine's subsidiarity principle in the context of *Caritas*.¹⁴⁶ This sort of convergence, eventually, is a point in favour of shared values regarding contemporary economic problems between secular and religious standpoints that can help in co-operating for finding solutions.

Before analysing the principles of social doctrine in greater depth, there is a necessary premise. In reading these principles, it could happen that we are brought to interpret them independently one from another. This would be in opposition with that which is suggested in social teaching itself. There is supposed to be harmony among the principles, a character of harmony, as they should not be in contrast with each other, and a character of necessity, in the sense that each one needs the other principles to be completely performed.¹⁴⁷ Especially this latter aspect is closely related to the conception of social teaching regarding the individual human being, intended as a person. A 'person', according to social thought, is something different from an anonymous individual, and this difference can be understood only with the

¹⁴⁴ See PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004. 161.

¹⁴⁵ See above II, 2.1.

¹⁴⁶ See below chapter VIII, 2.

¹⁴⁷ See *Compendium*, 162.

co-operation of all the principles. As it should emerge, these principles have a large amount of interconnections and reciprocal traits.

Each principle is presented with its own specificity, but it is considered truly worthy if applied contextually with the others. For instance, a concrete common good would be realizable only among persons and not among individuals. Only when each one could determine himself as a person, or could find oneself on the way to become a person or, at least, to live in an environment that allows such growth, only at this point can we speak about the society envisaged by the *Compendium*. Things appear to be interlaced: only persons can build a common welfare, because a common welfare is supposed to exist only for them. Only when every body is a person we will have the opportunity to seek concretely the common good, because only persons can realize it.

The deeper meaning of such principles lies in the fact that, according to RC social thought, they represent the basis of social living. These words give connotation to the deeper foundations of society, both in a moral and in an economic sense.¹⁴⁸ Usually, all principles have a normative character, as do these. But in this case RC social thought puts the roots of this normative character in the social foundations of human life. According to the RCC's social thought, these principles are not supposed to be developed above – on top of – social life from an external source. In other terms, social thought claims to extrapolate the principles from social living itself.

Although normative in their character, in the intention of the Roman Catholic Church they should not be seen as impositions from outer sources. They are not supposed to be external elaborations of enlightened minds that are then projected on social life. Quite the opposite. The Roman Catholic Church aims to propose them as an explication of the human social life. And, if our human behaviour contrasts with such principles, social teaching claims, we might experience what we may call social instabilities and incoherencies.

In other words, these principles, as they are intended by social teaching, express at the same time what society is about and, in this way, they also address what should be done to make society really integrally human. Their normative character arises exactly when we want to comprehend them during the analysis of the social life. This happens both in theoretical approaches, and in practical examinations of social relationships. At the end of this brief consideration, the role of these principles as a synthetic program telling us what social behaviour should be, might be recapitulated as follows:

*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. [...] The principles of the Church's social doctrine must be appreciated in their unity, interrelatedness and articulation.*¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ See *Compendium*, 163.

¹⁴⁹ *Compendium*, 161 – 162.

One element that can be underlined again is that all the principles of the RCC's social teaching need to be understood in their unity. Their complete expression might be observed only when their application is contemporary, harmonic. It is probably the case that some principles can be regarded as more important than others. Nevertheless the Roman Catholic Church puts forward that they need to be interrelated to show their full potential.

Now, the first principle to be analysed, in order also to appreciate better the subsequent ones, is the *personalist principle* or, to paraphrase, the principle regarding the human person's dignity.

2. The personalist principle. Person and transcendence

The personalist principle is often mentioned in the *Compendium*, and is indeed one of the most relevant principles in social teaching. My intention is to treat the personalist principle's essential elements that are related to people's economic life. Nevertheless, it comes close to our scope of understanding social teaching's principles, also to look at the sources of this principle. The personalist principle has a philosophical foundation that allows us to see it in the context of social doctrine. Thus, even if we cannot treat extensively the philosophical origins of that current of thought called personalism, we need to be aware of its influence in the developing of this part of social teaching.

Maybe the father of the philosophical programme known as *personnalisme* could help us in understand 'who is' a person:

I can look at this body from without, examine its dispositions, its heredity, its form, its maladies; in short, I can treat it as an object of physiological, medical or other knowledge. He exercises functions, and there is a functional order and a functional psychology which I can *apply* to the study of his case, although they are not *he*, the whole man in his total reality. Moreover, and in the same way, he is *a* Frenchman, *a* bourgeois, *a* socialist, *a* catholic etc. But he is not *a* Bernard Chartier, he is Bernard Chartier. The thousands ways in which I can distinguish him, as *an* example of a class may help me to understand him, and above all to make use of him, they show me how practically to behave towards him. But these are merely sections taken, in each case, through one aspect of his existence. A thousand photographs put together will not amount to a man who walks, thinks and wills.¹⁵⁰

It is too easy to identify *personnalisme*, as a philosophical school of thought with personalism as the social and theological principle presented in the social doctrine. Mounier's philosophy, nevertheless, gives insightful paradigms, helpful for a concrete subsequent application of the principle. That is why I have quoted his passage, namely with the aim of presenting the same concept but from a slightly different angle. The fact is that it should not be so surprising to find juxtaposition and inspiration, and not only merely coincidence, between secular thoughts and religious doctrines of the RCC. However, the evaluation of Mounier's thought does not appear a simple task. In it can be found conservative elements as well as progressive tendencies; firm oppositions to certain Marxist perspectives, but also the sharing of

¹⁵⁰ E. MOUNIER, *Personalism*. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1952. viii – ix.

some of its presuppositions. In politics, Mounier was an eminent representative of the French leftists¹⁵¹ interested in Marxist's views about alienation and consumer society, but equally clear in rejecting the revolutionary and materialistic output of specific Marxist positions.¹⁵² Certain connections in the evolution of Mounier's thought are not 'obvious'.¹⁵³ We can argue that as far as Mounier's philosophy was opposed to 'materialism, individualism and the tyranny of liberalism',¹⁵⁴ Mounier became the interpreter of the antagonism of the Roman Catholic Church towards these specific aspects found in modernity and in some modern philosophical thoughts. As far as Mounier opposed Marxist ideas, he became one of the main philosophical alternatives to Marxism in Europe for the Roman Catholic Church. In the United States figures such as Dorothy Day, together with the *Catholic Worker Movement* (1933), show us that personalist and communitarian principles were found in grass-root movements far from conservative political views but also alternative to Marxist doctrines.¹⁵⁵ And still, in Latin America, Mounier's thought has somehow influenced anti-capitalist views within Roman Catholic social teaching when local intellectuals borrowed from him the term 'communitarianism'.¹⁵⁶

This complex and articulated historical and philosophical setting is not less complex than the general relationship between the high hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, usually seen an anti-modern force with conservative elements, in front of the leftist, or at least non-conservative, tendencies of many Roman Catholic individuals, as the Italian example of the 1960s can confirm.¹⁵⁷ Then, we cannot ignore how personalism influenced the Roman Catholic intellectual life of the last century through the perspectives of, for instance, Jacques Maritain and Paul Ricoeur,¹⁵⁸ and Karol Wojtyła. This last, before becoming pope as John Paul II, in 1969 published in Polish *Osoba I czyn*, translated, revised and published in English in 1979 as *The acting person*,¹⁵⁹ in which he develops an alternative to the Marxist methodology rooted in personalism and phenomenology.¹⁶⁰ Today, we notice that Mounier's thought has been expressly quoted by bishop Mario Toso, Secretary of

¹⁵¹ See D. WOLF, Emmanuel Mounier: a Catholic of the left, in *The Review of Politics*, 22. 3. 1960.

¹⁵² J. HELLMAN, French 'left-Catholics' and Communism in the Nineteen-thirties, in *Church History*, 45, 4. 1976. 509.

¹⁵³ S. ARMUS, The eternal enemy: Emmanuel Mounier's *Esprit* and French anti-americanism, in *French Historical Studies*, vol. 24, 2. 2001. 272.

¹⁵⁴ ARMUS, The eternal enemy, in *French Historical Studies*, 271.

¹⁵⁵ See M. ZWICK, L. ZWICK, *The Catholic worker movement. Intellectual and spiritual origins*. New York: Paulist Press, 2005. 97 – 115; B. LEAVITT, Peaceprofile: Dorothy Day, in *Peace Review. A journal of social justice*, 9. 3. 1997. 431 – 438; A. BECK, Making the Encyclicals click: Catholic social teaching and radical traditions, in *New Blackfriars*, 93. 1044. 2012. 217 – 219.

¹⁵⁶ P. E. SIGMUND, Latin American Catholicism's opening to the left, in *The Review of Politics*, 35. 1. 1973. 64

¹⁵⁷ See R. DRAKE, Catholics and the Italian revolutionary left of the 1960s, in *The Catholic Historical Review*, 94. 3. 2008.

¹⁵⁸ See E. BERTI, Il concetto di persona nella storia del pensiero filosofico, in E. BERTI, G. COTTIER, G. PIANA, G. SANTINELLO, L. SARTORI, G. TRENTIN, *Persona e personalismo. Aspetti filosofici e teologici*. Padova: Fondazione Lanza / Gregoriana Libreria Editrice, 1992. 43 – 74.

¹⁵⁹ See JOHN PAUL II, The acting person, in A-T. Tymieniecka, *Analecta Husserliana. Yearbook of Phenomenological Research*, X. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979.

¹⁶⁰ See J. ŻYCINSKI, The role of religious and intellectual elements in overcoming Marxism in Poland, in *Studies in Soviet Thought*, 43. 1992. 143 – 144.

Justitia et Pax at the time I am writing.¹⁶¹ Indeed, communitarian and personalist perspectives maintain a relevant place in today's Roman Catholic social teaching,¹⁶² contributing to prospect a social alternative to more Marxist oriented doctrines. We observe this from the *Compendium's* passages about the human person, and from Benedict XVI's emphasis on the individual 'personal' contribution to the common good in *Caritas*.¹⁶³ As well as we still observe a tension between the RC hierarchy and theological movements that openly pursue, and push for, more political involvement of the RC clergy in politics, especially in the Latin American context, as we will later see.¹⁶⁴

We can also notice how, after a period in which most philosophers left aside investigation on 'the person', there is also a renewed interest in it in more recent times. In this regard, some authors have interpreted in a personalist sense authors such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Hans Jonas and Charles Taylor. Some parts of the works of these authors are seen as focussing on the analysis of the moral sphere in the human person and on the relation between individual and society in the modern age. This is worthy of attention, because it could reveal the convergence of the secular interest and the social doctrine towards the human person.¹⁶⁵

There is one element that links a secular view of the human person with the view that social teaching brings us. This is found in the specificity attributed to the individual human being. For instance, both social teaching and Mounier's philosophy consider the individual human being as unique and unrepeatable. And due to these characteristics, the person, in the RCC's social doctrine, has an intrinsic value. 'Person' and 'individual', in the strict context of the social doctrine of the RCC may indicate two antithetic approaches to the study of social life. In fact, most of the criticism towards the extremism of the modern consumer society and some other modern attitudes have their reasons here. Namely, the RCC considers that there are substantial differences in the distinction between 'an individual' and 'a person'. We look now for the source of this distinction, the element that gives to the definition of the human person a particular substantial character. Thus, it might be proper to ask a question: what, or better, who is at the core of the RCC's social doctrine? The person is the answer we are looking for:

The Church sees in men and women, in every person, the living image of God himself. [...] All of social life is an expression of its unmistakable protagonist: the human person. [...]. The whole of the Church's social doctrine, in fact, develops from the principle that affirms the inviolable dignity of the human person (see JOHN XXIII, Mater et magistra. AAS 53, 1961. 453, 459). [...] The

¹⁶¹ See M. TOSO, Z. FORMELLA, A. DANESE, *Emmanuel Mounier. Persona ed umanesimo relazionale nel centenario della nascita (1905 – 2005)*. Roma: LAS, 2005; M. TOSO, La dottrina sociale della Chiesa per un nuovo umanesimo integrale e solidale, in *Note di Pastorale Giovanile*, 326. 2008. 40 – 52.

¹⁶² D. MELÉ, The firm as a 'community of persons': a pillar of humanistic business *ethos*, in *Journal of Business Ethics*, 106. 2012. 94; P. CARLOTTI, 'Un chiarimento decisivo'. DSC e teologia morale, in P. CARLOTTI, M. TOSO, eds., *Per un umanesimo degno dell'amore. Il 'Compendio della Dottrina sociale della Chiesa'*. Roma: LAS, 2005. 174

¹⁶³ See below VI, 2.2.2.

¹⁶⁴ See below VI, 2.3.

¹⁶⁵ See the recent P. NEPI, *Individui e persona. L'identità del soggetto morale in Taylor, MacIntyre e Jonas*. Roma: Edizioni Studium, 2000. 49 – 56. An overview on these themes is in B. FORTE, *L'uno per l'altro. Per un'etica della trascendenza*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2003.

dignity of the human person [...] is the foundation of all other principles and content of all the Church's social doctrine¹⁶⁶

We see how the RCC individuates the source of the dignity of the person in the being made as a living image of God. This gives to the human subject a specific character. As we consider this the central theme of the personalist principle in social teaching we see also its relevance in this context. This principle is the root of all the other principles, which then flower from it like leafs from a tree.

The main point which distinguishes the RCC's conception of the human being, is the relation to God. The human being, in RC theology, is God's most important creature, and is created as the closest image of God. From this derives a 'transcendent' dignity, a dignity that transcends the material limits of the individual. The result of this, is that we should consider each other human person as another self:

A just society can become a reality only when it is based on the respect of the transcendent dignity of the human person. The person represents the ultimate end of society, by which it is ordered to the person [...]. It is necessary to 'consider every neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity' (*Gaudium*, 27). Every political, economic, social, scientific and cultural programme must be inspired by the awareness of the primacy of each human being over society (see *Catechism*, 2235).¹⁶⁷

The discussion about the person may not be complete until we talk about transcendence according to social teaching. The consideration that social thought gives to transcendence is due to the fact that through that transcendent character, according to social thought, human beings are able to respect each other. Individual human beings can transcend their personal self and they can see the same dignity that belongs to them also in all other human beings.

The personalist principle implies the primacy of the person in front of the institutions.¹⁶⁸ Social teaching points out how the policies adopted at different levels of society must take into account the human being's individual dignity, which means that the end of preserving the general interest is reached through the preservation of each citizen's dignity.

In the context of social doctrine, one of the main consequences of recognizing a person's transcendent aspects is the possibility to transcend the limitations of one's current perspectives. It would mean to surpass the singularity and particularity of one's own experience, and project oneself towards the universal. To transcend the immediate singularity of the self is, for social doctrine, a relevant pre-condition to the development of fraternity among persons. Transcendence becomes in such a framework a necessary pre-requisite for overcoming a situation in which the material level of living is heavily dominant. All the other people around us are essential in comprehending our own human nature. Through the transcendent regard we put towards other human beings we might understand better their 'being':

¹⁶⁶ *Compendium*, 105 – 107, 160.

¹⁶⁷ *Compendium*, 132.

¹⁶⁸ See *Compendium*, 133.

*Openness to transcendence belongs to the human person: man is open to the infinite and to all created beings. He is open above all to the infinite - God - because with his intellect and will he raises himself above all the created order and above himself, he becomes independent from creatures, is free in relation to created things and tends towards total truth and the absolute good. He is open also to others, to the men and women of the world, because only insofar as he understands himself in reference to a 'thou' can he say 'I'. He comes out of himself, from the self-centred preservation of his own life, to enter into a relationship of dialogue and communion with others. The human person is open to the fullness of being, to the unlimited horizon of being.*¹⁶⁹

If we focus on the last sentences in the quote above, it follows one other relevant conclusion about this characteristic trait of the human person according to the RCC's social teaching. Transcendence is a main trait, a very specific element that characterizes human beings in their openness with each other and in establishing possibilities for dialogue and communion. That is why his transcendent character must be preserved with the greatest care. To transcend the self, that is already an intellectual act, is absolutely necessary to understand both 'I' and 'you'.

In this discourse, the meaning of transcending the self deals with the understanding of the self as in relation with another self. The relation between me and the other has been extensively treated in philosophy. But speaking from a religious point of view about this relation, it means no other thing than speaking about the effort a human has to do for recognizing the common human nature in another person. I transcend myself to see what is human in another person. In the idea proposed in the social doctrine the result is that if we see what pertains to ourselves also in the others, like in a mirror, we are making our first step for a better and more human social co-habitation. More distinctively then, *Compendium* states that only through respect due to each human being's transcendent character is it possible to build justice in society.

3. The common good

The common good is one of the main ends that social doctrine aims to fulfil. It should be considered its clearest practical accomplishment. But here, nevertheless, it is treated as a principle, and we have to define its theoretical content. I will give a description that might be helpful especially for interpreting the common good as a permanent principle. The common good is an ideal for people willing to realize a living-together; and this appears to be interesting especially in an epoch of intense globalization as today is.

As the 'common good' simply expresses by its words, its subject matter is about shared welfare: the good for the community. It is about a fair well-being for everybody. And from the *Compendium* we see that its source is in the fact that we, human beings, are part of the same family. Thus, social doctrine says, we are all equal with regard to our dignity:

¹⁶⁹ *Compendium*, 130.

*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’ (Gaudium, 26. See Catechism, 1905 - 1912; Mater, AAS 53. 417 - 421; Pacem, AAS 55. 272 - 273; Octogesima, 46). 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 attain it, increase it and safeguard its effectiveness, with regard also to the future.*¹⁷⁰

More concretely, the common good calls each human to a personal responsibility towards other people. Such a responsibility finds expression both in close relations and then through the roles in the political and economic institutions one may have. In other words, we could say that fulfilling what social doctrine intends for the common good means that each human person, guided by the good will, is supposed to ponder the everyday actions in the framework of shared welfare:

*Authentic social changes are effective and lasting only to the extent that they are based on resolute changes in personal conduct. An authentic moralization of social life will never be possible unless it starts with people and has people as its point of reference: indeed, ‘living a moral life bears witness to the dignity of the person’ (Catechism, 1706). It is obviously the task of people to develop those moral attitudes that are fundamental for any society that truly wishes to be human (justice, honesty, truthfulness, etc.), and which in no way can simply be expected of others or delegated to institutions.*¹⁷¹

In this sense, responsibility regards each one in daily activities. In this context, there is not a strict scheme to follow, but just having as main end that of contributing to the general welfare. Moreover, the awareness of the role played by persons more than by institutions becomes necessary.

In this perspective, it is therefore necessary that attributes like honesty and truthfulness should primarily originate from one’s personal conscience. Only subsequently such characteristics can be found in the institutions. These considerations do not exclude at all the role of the state in participating in the realization of the common good. On the contrary, the social doctrine finds in the common good the main reason for which the state exists.¹⁷² Only the state can ‘guarantee the coherency, unity and organization of the civil society of which it is an expression’.¹⁷³

The common good does not presupposes a program fixed once and for all, but it is thought to interact with the daily multiple exigencies of individual persons. As the world is complex, the common good reflects this complexity in being pursued and achieved. We can summarize what can be the person’s role in such a context. First, each person has to strive in order to satisfy individual needs, realizing life

¹⁷⁰ *Compendium*, 164.

¹⁷¹ *Compendium*, 134.

¹⁷² See *Compendium*, 168 – 169.

¹⁷³ *Compendium*, 169.

according to personal desires and, to the extent that the person has freedom in doing this, is also responsible for the results. Second, at the same time the person must be aware of the possibility to influence the world of other people. The way a person chooses the objectives, the method chosen for accomplishing them, and the degree of such achievement, are all elements that, more or less, directly or indirectly, may concur to these same aspects in another person's life.

A message coming from the *Compendium* concerning the common good is that being part of the common good implicitly means to fulfil the moral obligations of being a person. Moreover, being part of the common good means that persons share the common good as, at the same time, they contribute to its realization. As just seen above, social thought tells us that only among persons we can experience the common good. This does not mean that persons not sharing or not contributing to the common good are not considered persons. Social thought calls for the responsible moral duty of each person in acknowledging the being part of a community. Bishop Mario Toso quotes the definition of common good given by Jacques Maritain as the 'good human life of the multitude'.¹⁷⁴ Toso identifies this with the ancient *bonum honestum*, the 'honest good', that is a good end in itself regarding the hard exercise of virtue as a mean and as an end of the human living in society.¹⁷⁵ The common well-being means that each one is recognized for his dignity in being a human person. In this way it seems that in the intention of the social doctrine the two aspects, common and personal, fulfil each other. As far as the common good calls for personal responsibility towards others this would mean, translating *Compendium's* words, to take into consideration to submit one's own interest to the interest of others. In social thought, being a person has nothing to do with being egoistic, on the contrary, we are persons when we take care of one other:

*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 (see Mater, AAS 53, 417; Octogesima, 46; Catechism, 1913). 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*¹⁷⁶

Recently, such a perspective has been referred to in a study published by the Libreria Editrice Vaticana,¹⁷⁷ the official publisher of the Vatican City state. In reflecting about the meanings and the possibilities of the globalization, ideas like those of Muhammad Yunus,¹⁷⁸ the founder of the Grameen Bank and many other initiatives, have been taken as exemplary.¹⁷⁹ This appreciation comes from the fact that Yunus

¹⁷⁴ See M. TOSO, *Umanesimo sociale. Viaggio nella dottrina social della Chiesa e dintorni*. Roma: LAS, 2001.72.

¹⁷⁵ See TOSO, *Umanesimo sociale*, 72.

¹⁷⁶ *Compendium*, 167.

¹⁷⁷ See G. SCANAGATTA, A. PASETTO, *Sviluppo e bene commune. Per un'economia non separata dall'etica e per un'etica fondata sull'inviolabile dignità dell'uomo*. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 2012.

¹⁷⁸ See M. YUNUS, *Creating a world without poverty. Social business and the future of capitalism*. New York: Public Affairs, 2007 and M. YUNUS, *Building social business. The new kind of capitalism that serves humanity's most pressing needs*. New York: Public Affairs, 2010.

¹⁷⁹ SCANAGATTA, PASETTO, *Sviluppo e bene commune*, 85 – 89.

has operated taking into account the particular needs and exigencies of the local people. His banking activity is built upon the ‘interest’ that other persons may live a better life through accessing to its particular form of credit. This example shows firstly that social doctrine is proposing something that is not too far from reality. In the context of globalization, the example confirms how the responsibility in building the common good cannot be demanded exclusively of public institutions. Every subject has the responsibility of doing what is in his or her possibilities.¹⁸⁰

This being said, there is another point regarding the common good that needs here to be underlined. It is about the meaning of transcendence in relation to the realization of the common good. If the common good is considered an ‘end in itself’, the *Compendium* warns us, this would lead to the emptying of its meaning. The common good is interpreted as a universal value that regards the whole creation. Which means that it should not be limited to the good shared in common by a limited amount of people. The common good is only pursued when it takes into account all people living in the world. It should represent the horizon, against ego-centric drives, in which we ought to contextualize our socio-economic choices both at the personal and institutional level. But it should not represent an end in itself:

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.¹⁸¹

Thus, in social thought the common good is not identified uniquely with material welfare. To have the common good intended exclusively in material terms would determine that our well-being would become our end not recognizing that there is a transcendent nature also implied in the common good.

Social teaching points that the common good aims to fulfil human being’s full realization, letting them understand their transcendent value as creatures created by God. Therefore also the common good is a means of preparing, we might say, for the encounter between God and humanity. In this sense, as said in the quote above, the common good does not corresponds with the mere realization of material richness. It implies not only a material transformation of the way we act and we live, but has a transcendent scope which regards closer our spiritual transformation and our attitude towards other persons.

3.1. *The universal destination of goods*

While investigating the common good we come across a related particular principle that is the universal destination of goods. We have seen that this principle was implicitly present in the previous sources of social teaching, but it has been clearly introduced only since Vatican II with *Gaudium et spes*.¹⁸² My intention now, anyhow, is to furnish an analysis of its content.

This principle states that all resources present in nature, and all the wealth that derives from them, are not supposed to be used by only a few people. It should

¹⁸⁰ SCANAGATTA, PASETTO, *Sviluppo e bene commune*, 130 – 138.

¹⁸¹ *Compendium*, 170.

¹⁸² See above III, 6.

be instead a proper economic task to find out the best ways to share all the benefits of such resources. This principle, as the *Compendium* tells us, originates from the fact that all the good things the human beings may have from the world are supposed to be a gift from God.¹⁸³ On different occasions the Pontifical Council Justice and Peace has also underlined how traces of this principle can be found in the Old Testament and in the writings of theologians of the early church.¹⁸⁴

The principle of the universal destination of goods also implies a punctual elaboration of rights and duties within a legal framework. For instance, an individual entrepreneur acting towards the realization of the common good should not find obstructions but only advantages coming from the bureaucratic body.

Thus, from one side, it is up to the single economic actor to strive for the common good and to sacrifice part of his personal material interest for the well-being of others. From the other side, it should be up to the public institutions to furnish adequate frameworks that recognize the necessity of ‘submitting all other rights, private property or free trade, to the universal destination of goods’:

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. [...] 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.’¹⁸⁵

There is an interesting element here. It is explicitly stated by the *Compendium* that in social thought private property must be submitted to the universal destination of goods. Both principles are considered as expressions of natural rights. The universal destination of goods has ‘priority’ over all other principles regarding the administration and possession of goods. This hierarchy established in these social principles regards the responsibility of the richer towards the poor already seen before.¹⁸⁶ In other words, this means that the possession of things in RCC’s thought, needs to have as final goal the realization of the common good. We are going to analyse this relationship more in detail now.

3.2. Private property and the universal destination of goods

Is there a disagreement in the fact that private property has in RC social teaching the status of a natural right, but at the same time it is subordinated to another right, namely the universal destination of goods?

To begin with the right on private property is not denied. Social teaching officially recognizes it as a natural right since *Rerum novarum*. To possess, even to

¹⁸³ *Compendium*, 171.

¹⁸⁴ See on this JUSTICE ET PAIX [PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE], *Colloque International ‘Un terre pour tous les hommes’*. Paris: Éditions du Centurion, 1992.

¹⁸⁵ *Compendium*, 172.

¹⁸⁶ See above I, 2.

possess a lot, to be very rich, is not by itself something evil, bad, or sinful that the RCC wants to forbid. The value judgement concerns the use and the end that the rich person wants to attain. It is not to be rich which is sinful, but to devote oneself exclusively to richness. In other words, what is relevant in the RC view is the use of the things possessed, not their possession.

Actually, trying to answer the introductory question of this sub-chapter, we should not speak of a disagreement between two principles, but of the need for a hierarchy between two human necessities established in social teaching. One is that of personal possession, and the other one is about sharing that possession. This latter is mainly the need of those who do not own enough for themselves. The first, according to RC social teaching, is a means to achieve the latter and the duty of someone who owns something.¹⁸⁷ The hierarchical relation between the two principles schematizes their role in the whole context of social thought: the sharing of goods is an objective, while the private property is an instrument to reach that end. This means that the principle of the universal destination of goods implies for its concretization that the human persons have to act according to the implementation of the general welfare and not exclusively according to their proper and legitimate interests.¹⁸⁸ This perspective identifies who owns something more with the figure of an administrator than that of a mere possessor. The person is an administrator or steward because the person is charged with the responsibility of doing something with the possessed goods, that is not just private use. In this direction goes also the traditional view of the theologians of the early church, re-proposed through the *Compendium* and individually by various popes.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, RC social thought makes a distinction in the assignment of roles to some human faculties.¹⁹⁰ Namely, to possess is relevant but it is not an absolute right. On the contrary, what is absolutely decisive for society is the use of that possession for communal purposes:

*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' (JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem exercens*. 14. AAS 73. 1981). [...] This principle is not opposed to the right to private property (*Rerum, Acta* 11. 102) but indicates the need to regulate it.*¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ About the theoretical role of private property as a way to reach the universal destination of goods, see also the intervention of J-Y. CALVEZ, *Les moyens d'assurer la destination universelle des biens*, in *Colloque International 'Un terre pour tous les hommes'*.

¹⁸⁸ See *Compendium*, 178.

¹⁸⁹ See above I, 2. St. Ambrose of Milan quoted by pope Paul VI summarizes the position: 'You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.' (*De Nabute*, c. 12, n. 53, PL 14. 747; see J. R. PALANQUE, *Saint Ambroise et l'empire romain*. Paris: De Boccard, 1933. 336). These words indicate that the right to private property is not absolute and unconditional. No one may appropriate surplus goods solely for his own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life.' *Populorum*, 23.

¹⁹⁰ See *Compendium*, 178.

¹⁹¹ *Compendium*, 177.

Once the distinction and the relation between the possession of goods and their universal destination have been presented, there is another aspect. It regards the recognition made by the *Compendium* towards other forms of possession. For what concerns private property, the *Compendium* states that individual property is not the unique form of property we could rely on. Maybe, suggesting in this way that the implementation of other forms of possession can be fruitful for the objective of sharing the wealth as well.

A veiled criticism is made towards a widespread contemporary economic praxis of intending property as only belonging to an individual. Instead, in the RCC's opinion, we could learn a lot from our ancestors, or from far away populations and also from developing countries. In these contexts, that can be non-Western, other forms of property are practised at the same degree or even more often than individual private property. Generally these forms are ways of communal possession. Thus, while not denying the importance of private property, social teaching would also remind us that we very well can possess something, but the individual way of doing it is not the ultimate and definitive way:

*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 (see *Gaudium*, 69).¹⁹²*

It is interesting to notice one thing from the above quote. We observe how the social doctrine is not directly proposing a specific and punctual alternative. There is a general reference to the possibility that property in 'traditional forms' has its place in the economic setting of today. What is directly addressed is the possibility that possessing finds its place also in the 'community'. Given the legitimate character of the individual property, this does not exclude that there can be possession also in other forms.

The social doctrine identifies these 'forms of property' with traditional ways of possessing in common. In this sense, we can read the proposal for re-discovering such traditional or ancient forms. Moreover, according to social teaching, such forms may be present both in economically advanced and less economically developed countries. This implies the respect for other forms of property even if they do not coincide with the form of the individual property.

Thus, a practical result of this view of social teaching is that other forms of property, such as communal property can fit with the ideal of the common good.

It is also possible that they are already present in local contexts as ancient forms of exchange. In this case, social teaching proposes a way for re-thinking

¹⁹² *Compendium*, 180.

economic development in our contexts, using traditional forms of possession as an inspiration for us. It is then specified how the ways of possessing things are subjected to development. Therefore, the preservation of traditional forms should not block their development, or discourage the introduction of new forms in those same contexts. In the end, it might be an interesting a fruitful idea that of looking to diverse forms of ownership in different times and places. This sense this might inspire our development and the way we decide to administrate our wealth.

4. *The subsidiarity principle*

The subsidiarity principle is constantly present in all of the RCC's social teaching since the first social encyclical, *Rerum novarum*, and then it is continuously reaffirmed, like in *Quadragesimo anno* where it is better specified and formalized, and in the update made in *Caritas*.¹⁹³ Its permanent presence is due to the contribution it gives to the achievement of human being's full dignity in the sense adopted by social teaching. This principle allows an interpretation of the individual citizen as not absolutely subordinated to institutions. The motto that summarizes this principle was adopted by Pius XII and confirmed by subsequent popes: *civitas propter cives, non cives propter civitatem*.¹⁹⁴ Society is for the person and not the person for society.

To correctly explain this principle we have to start from the assumption that we are considering in society the existence of at least two main different levels of intervention. The first we may identify is civil society. It is composed both by citizens in their individuality and by their free ways of association in the widest sense, from family to sport teams. The second is the public institutional level, also formed by citizens, but which does not act as a person but as an institution. This second does not build relationships by itself and cannot take into consideration each possible singular personal necessity. Institutions act by definition towards public and general welfare but, due to their inner functioning mechanisms. They cannot take into account each single request coming from members of civil society otherwise they will be charged with too many tasks, risking collapse. That is why institutions have to choose, among the many, which are the interests suitable to be satisfied for the general welfare of society as a whole.

If, from one side the person is considered preceding the state, from another side, the subsidiarity principle's observance requires awareness from the single person to be part of civil society. Moreover, the principle requires from him the voluntary action for improving civil society in new and effective forms of socialization.

The content of the principle can be described as follows: when the individual citizen, or associations of citizens, can act in a social environment for improving the social environment, the citizens should be free from any institutional structure or

¹⁹³ See *Compendium*, 185; *Quadragesimo* 79; *Caritas*, 57; and below VII, 3.1., 3.2. See P. MAGAGNOTTI, *Il principio di sussidiarietà nella dottrina sociale della chiesa*. Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1991. 21; J-B. D'ONORIO, La subsidiarité, analyse d'un concept, in ACTES DU XII^E COLLOQUE NATIONAL DE LA CONFÉDÉRATION DES JURISTES CATHOLIQUES DE FRANCE, *La subsidiarité. De la théorie à la pratique*. Paris: Téqui, 1993. 16.

¹⁹⁴ See MAGAGNOTTI, *Il principio di sussidiarietà nella dottrina sociale della chiesa*, 15.

barrier in doing it. The individual person needs to have the own space in determining which are the most accurate and effective forms of action at the social level for satisfying the personal needs.

The RCC assumes that at the level of civil society the individual person is more able both to detect problems, needs and necessities, and to find solutions and social frameworks for them. In this, social teaching appears to be in agreement with those political systems where the subsidiarity principle is at work. In this respect the European Union is a major example.¹⁹⁵ Here, the subsidiarity principle is explicitly recognized since 1992, with the Treaty on European Union in Maastricht. In Europe the subsidiarity principle states that, for subjects that are not specific competence of the European Union, the decisions should be taken as closely as possible to the level of citizenship. Hence, an intervention by the European Union is justified only when solutions at local, regional or national level might be inappropriate. The *ratio* behind this principle is, as in social teaching, the assumption that at a closer level of intervention the measures can be more effective in matching the citizens' interests.¹⁹⁶

Thus, the institutional role is just that of guaranteeing for the citizens enough juridical tools for building their own path. The meaning of the Latin word *subsidium*, as 'help', refers to this case. Namely, public institutions should provide the economic and juridical help to the other levels of civil society leaving to these lower levels the necessary institutional space for properly operating:

*On the basis of this principle [subsidiarity], 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.*¹⁹⁷

From what was written above, we should interpret the observance of the subsidiarity principle as a firm opposition to an excessive public intervention, bureaucratization, and centralization of decision-making processes and waste of public energies.

Social teaching claims that while exercising the principle of subsidiarity we exercise respect for human persons in all their multiple ways of expression in society. The intervention of public authorities, as briefly mentioned above, is conceived to be effective only in those situation in which the individual, or many individuals, cannot practically succeed with their own forces, for instance when it is required an unusual and wide economic intervention, or in regards of heavy and urgent unbalances in social justice.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, we can argue that individuals have the characteristic of creativity, which is usually unknown to institutions. Through this, it is possible for them to foresee ways totally unreachable for impersonal entities like institutions are.

¹⁹⁵ See J-P. JACQUÉ, La subsidiarité en droit communautaire; F. SCHWERER, La subsidiarité dans l'organisation européenne ou le détournement d'une valeur chrétienne, both in ACTES, *La subsidiarité. De la théorie à la pratique*.

¹⁹⁶ More details can be found in the European Parliament's website: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/122/en.htm>

¹⁹⁷ *Compendium*, 186.

¹⁹⁸ See *Compendium*, 187 – 188.

5. *The solidarity principle*

According to social thought, the need for this principle is particularly tangible in our contemporary interwoven world. Social thought considers humanity as one single global family. Thus, in such a family as in any other, solidarity should be its basis. We will see a similar attitude while analysing the later part of *Caritas*.¹⁹⁹

From the consideration of humanity as a global family it is easier to understand the bond of solidarity that links all the people of the world. In a family all the parts should cooperate and are ready to help each other. In social thought's view the same applies in the world. Moreover, we should interpret the world on the basis of the principle of solidarity. In regards of this global attitude regarding the solidarity principle, the *Compendium* largely draws from the interpretation given by John Paul II in his social encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. Indeed, *Sollicitudo* and its themes on solidarity and the full development of people through solidarity,²⁰⁰ are addressed to the whole world, and not only to part of it.²⁰¹

The new information technologies have given an enormous contribution in enlightening these bonds as present on a global scale. Indeed, technologies have given humanity the possibility to exchange enormous amounts of information in a short time, from parts of the world very far from each other. As the RCC's teaching constantly points out, the world is increasingly more interdependent regarding knowledge of each other; the circulation of information has reached today levels never seen in the past.²⁰² This phenomenon should cause in our attitude more responsibility towards other human beings, not only because we see them suffering, but also because we see that they are persons like us. The reasoning is that to know more and better other people and their social conditions can enhance a person's inner socialization character.²⁰³ Thanks new technological developments, the Roman Catholic Church sees also a path towards an augmented consciousness about different populations and the fact that we live in the same world, and that we are dependent upon each other. In the end, growth in reciprocal knowledge can provide better knowledge of those bonds of solidarity that social teaching sees as partly already present but that need also to be improved.

In this sense new technologies help the implementation of cohesion among peoples through the interdependence they enlighten. New technologies can also give us more evidence about the fact that we live in a world where there are 'stark inequalities between developed and developing countries'.²⁰⁴ In such a context, to promote social justice is not something that can be confined within the borders of a

¹⁹⁹ See below VIII, 2.2.

²⁰⁰ See *Sollicitudo*, 38 – 40; F. BIFFI, Cinque letture dello sviluppo dei Popoli. Guida introduttiva all'enciclica '*Sollicitudo rei socialis*', in PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITÀ LATERANENSE, *Le ragioni della speranza. Studi sull'enciclica Sollicitudo rei socialis*. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 1988. 160 – 169.

²⁰¹ See M. TOSO, Principali contenuti e aspetti di novità nella '*Sollicitudo rei socialis*', in M. TOSO, ed., *Solidarietà, nuovo nome della pace. Studi sull'Enciclica 'Sollicitudo rei socialis' di Giovanni Paolo II offerti a don Giuseppe Gemmellaro*. Torino: Editrice Elle Di Ci, 1988. 28

²⁰² See also *Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the 42th World Communications Day 2*, May 4, 2008.

²⁰³ See *Compendium*, 192.

²⁰⁴ *Compendium*, 192.

single state. According to RCC's social thought, solidarity as a social principle can be a contemporary way for expressing human friendship and fraternity. This global accent in the understanding of the solidarity principle is also pointed out in official documents prepared with regards to the definition of a responsible citizenship in the contemporary world.²⁰⁵

Social thought intends the principle of solidarity also as a moral virtue that should order the life of institutions.²⁰⁶ Solidarity is considered the social criterion by which institutions are coordinated internally. It also represents the organizing criterion for the relations among different institutions, and between institutions and the civil society. Regarding especially this last aspect, the effort the social teaching proposes implies the modification of certain institutionalized rules in the economic context.

To do this, it has been pointed out that two principles, solidarity and subsidiarity, should be applied together.²⁰⁷ This means that the less institutionalized levels of society, for instance the civil society, or civil associations in general, should be more free from higher institutional barriers. In the end, in the context of the market economy, solidarity does not mean less regulation for the market, but more freedom to operate also outside the market. In this sense then, the implementation of real solidarity would call for an implementation of subsidiarity.

Social teaching indeed speaks of 'structures of solidarity', that can be realized through the 'appropriate creation or modification of laws, market regulations, and juridical systems'.²⁰⁸

Then, the content of this principle should appear clearer if we think of solidarity as a moral virtue, namely as something inherent to the individual's moral conscience.

In defining solidarity as a moral virtue the *Compendium* says that

*Solidarity must be seen above all in its value as a moral virtue that determines the order of institutions. [...] Solidarity is [...] 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 (JOHN PAUL II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis. AAS 80, 1988. 565 - 566. 38).*²⁰⁹

Solidarity expresses itself as a moral virtue and not merely as a sentimental empathy with another's suffering, but an expression of the necessary will of practising justice in society. In this perspective, social thought speaks about the fact that each person should see himself as indebted towards society in as far as society coincides with that entity that allows persons to be born, grow and realize their personal life according to

²⁰⁵ See, for instance, UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Faithful Citizenship. A call to political responsibility*. Washington, D.C.: 2011. 15. Available online at: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/>

²⁰⁶ *Compendium*, 193.

²⁰⁷ See S. ZAMAGNI, Linee di un disegno istituzionale in campo economico che coniughi sussidiarietà e solidarietà, in S. ZAMAGNI, ed., *Economia solidale*. Casale Monferrato: Edizioni Piemme, 1996. 9 – 13.

²⁰⁸ *Compendium*, 193.

²⁰⁹ *Compendium*, 193.

their exigencies.²¹⁰ Once we are able to give back something to society, we should do it. This ‘giving back’ can precisely represent a manner of exerting justice through solidarity.

In its deeper meaning solidarity has its origin in the Gospel. In fact, in the *Compendium* solidarity represents the privileged way for the realization of the common good, through the teaching of Jesus, for which solidarity means

[...] 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 (see Mt 10: 40 - 42, 20: 25; Mk 10: 42 - 45; Lk 22: 25 - 27)(see *Sollicitudo*, 38; *Laborem*, 8; *Centesimus Annus*. 57. AAS 83, 1991. 862 - 863.).²¹¹

Presented in this way, the solidarity principle deserves a central role in the entire context of social doctrine. Regarding the socio-economic situation, Dionigi Tettamanzi, Archbishop of Milan from 2002 to 2009, emphasized that ‘there is no future without solidarity’.²¹²

²¹⁰ See *Compendium*, 195.

²¹¹ *Compendium*, 193.

²¹² See D. TETTAMANZI, *Non c'è futuro senza solidarietà. La crisi economica e l'aiuto della Chiesa*. Milano: San Paolo, 2009.