

CHAPTER TWO Abbreviated)

FOUNDATIONS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

46. The Social Doctrine of the Church is a living reality, in dialogue with history, cultures and sciences. At the same time, it enshrines a core set of unchanging truths. For this reason, it can be considered a form of wisdom that is capable of guiding the personal and societal lives of believers even today. In this second chapter, I would like to focus on some of the foundations and principles of the Church's Social Doctrine that will help us to interpret the "new things" of our time, particularly in view of the inherent dignity of the human person. In order to protect the human person in the age of artificial intelligence, I believe that today we must once again reflect on the common good, the universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, solidarity and social justice. I am convinced that a harmonious relationship between these principles requires that they be considered collectively, so that it becomes clear how they relate to and complement each other.

The human person: image of the Triune God

48. The Church's Social Doctrine brings us to the very heart of our faith: the mystery of the living God, revealed in Jesus Christ, who, as a communion of Persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — is love itself in relationship, expressed in the mutual gift of self and in sharing with the world. [51] As the Council recalled, human persons are called to communion with God and "can fully discover their true selves only in sincere self-giving." [52] Indeed their deepest vocation is to enter into the Trinitarian dynamic of love received and shared.

50. At the heart of the Christian understanding of the human person lies the great biblical affirmation that men and women are created in the image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-27) of the Triune God. Created for relationship, every human person is planned and willed by God to enter into communion with him, with others and with creation. Human dignity does not depend on a person's abilities, wealth or position in life, nor on the right or wrong choices made; instead, it is a gift that precedes and transcends each person, endowed by God as an expression of his unfailing love. For this reason, the human person always remains the "way for the Church" [55] and the heart of every authentic path of integral human development. [56]

The equal dignity of all human beings

] This statement follows the line already laid out by the Second Vatican Council, which had noted a growing recognition of the sublime dignity of all persons, their superiority over material things and their universal and inviolable rights and duties. [58] It is important to ensure that this growth in appreciation of human dignity is not obscured by the pressure of new ideologies or very powerful interests in today's world. Among these ideologies, I consider particularly insidious the one that suggests that every person must earn or justify his or her own worth, to

the point of attributing greater value to those who are more efficient or effective. From this perspective, persons end up being reduced to a means of achieving results, a resource to be used and exploited, and are no longer recognized as a proper end in themselves who should never be instrumentalized. The value of persons, however, does not depend on what they achieve or produce. There are rights that apply to everyone simply by virtue of being human, and no human power can legitimately deny or arbitrarily limit them. [59]

53. The fundamental dignity of each person, therefore, is neither acquired nor earned, nor does it need to be justified. The recent Declaration *Dignitas Infinita* offers a summary of the Church's thinking on this subject: "Every human person possesses an infinite dignity, inalienably grounded in his or her very being, which prevails in and beyond every circumstance, state, or situation the person may ever encounter" [62] — in other words, always and without exception. The dignity of every human being can be described as infinite, as Saint John Paul II stated, [63] for two reasons: first, because the love of God, who calls us to friendship with him, is infinite; and second, his love is absolutely unconditional, in the sense that, even if we search endlessly, we will never find anything that can erase or deny it.

The supreme value of human rights

54. The Church gratefully acknowledges that "the movement toward the identification and proclamation of human rights is one of the most significant attempts to respond effectively to the inescapable demands of human dignity." [64] In this regard, Saint John Paul II stated that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations on 10 December 1948, remains one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time. [65] It is "a milestone on the long and difficult path of the human race." [66] For this reason, from the Christian perspective, human rights are not an external addition to the person, but an expression of intrinsic human dignity, which the international community is called to protect and promote.

55. Human rights are inviolable, since they are "inherent in the human person and in human dignity." [67] Consequently, they are universal and inalienable. [68] Precisely because they are grounded in the common dignity of every man and woman, they have practical consequences and legal effects, for "it would be vain to proclaim human rights if, at the same time, everything were not done to ensure the duty of respecting them, respect by all, in all places and for all." [69] Among these rights, the first is the right to life, from conception to its natural end, [70] without which it is impossible to exercise any other right. When this fundamental right is denied — as in the cases of induced abortion, killing of the innocent and euthanasia — we are faced with choices that the Church considers gravely wrong. [71]

57. Along with a greater awareness of the value of every human person and their rights, recognition of minority rights has also grown. Yet, there is still a long way to go to ensure that the rights of a great many, namely women, are equally and genuinely guaranteed throughout the world. It is a fact that "doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights." [74] It is,

therefore, not enough to state simply that men and women have equal dignity and rights; it is necessary that this be reflected in concrete decisions, such as in laws, access to employment, education, social and political responsibilities, and the way society listens to and values women's contributions. As long as this gap persists, we cannot say that society truly and fully recognizes that women have the same dignity as men.

58. It is individuals that matter, each and every person, together with their families. Social movements, communal ideologies and grand political proclamations in favor of a population are worthless unless they lead to the flourishing of persons — men and women — with their inalienable rights. Similarly, it is not enough to extol individual freedom or private enterprise if we then allow a multitude of people to continue living without decent work, protections or access to basic necessities.

The principles of Social Doctrine

The principle of the common good

59. Recognizing that every man and woman possesses an inalienable dignity, together with rights that no human power can betray or nullify, requires us to shape the way we live together, including our economic and political choices, and the makeup of our cities. From this arises the first major principle of Social Doctrine that I wish to highlight: the common good. We can describe it as the social expression of the dignity recognized in every person. When Benedict XVI referred to the non-negotiable values that the Church must always defend, he included among them “the promotion of the common good.” [75] For a Christian, going beyond the narrow confines of one's own interests and committing oneself, within the limits of one's ability, to the common good is a non-negotiable value, as is the promotion of life.

60. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that the common good consists in “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.” [76] This definition provides us with a valuable initial reference point, because the common good cannot be reduced to a mere list of conditions or institutions. It is not the sum total of individual benefits, nor the intersection of their particular interests; it is a greater good that belongs to everyone, and it can only be achieved, nurtured and protected by our collective efforts. We can say that social action reaches its fullness when it is directed toward this shared good, just as a person's moral action finds its fulfillment in the choice of the true good. [77]

62. It is the pursuit of the common good that gives life to a people, understood not as a mere collection of individuals, but as a living reality in which people learn to recognize that they themselves are interconnected and jointly responsible for the *res publica*. In this sense, every person contributes to the building up of one's people through “a slow and arduous effort calling for a desire for integration and a willingness to achieve this through the growth of a peaceful and multifaceted culture of encounter.” [81] Working together for the common good means having a

shared vision. It is clear that there are many ideological and practical differences among people, as well as differing interests and frequent disagreements, but that does not mean it is impossible to engage in dialogue to establish a set of basic agreements that enable the creation of a shared vision, upon which everyone can move forward together.

63. It is the State's responsibility to ensure cohesion, unity and the proper organization of civil society, so that the common good can be pursued with everyone's contribution. In practical terms, this means that public authorities have the delicate duty to "harmonize the different sectoral interests with the requirements of justice," [82] seeking a balance between individual interests and the common good, without leaving behind the most vulnerable.

The principle of the universal destination of goods

65. "Among the numerous implications of the common good, immediate significance is taken on by the principle of the universal destination of goods." [85] First of all, this principle reminds us that the earth's goods — soil, water, air and natural resources — are given by God to the entire human family to sustain the lives of all, and that every person has an inherent right to the use of such goods, both now and in the future. Saint John Paul II recalled that, "God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone." [86] Consequently, "it is not in accordance with God's plan to use this gift in such a way that its benefits accrue solely to a select few." [87] Today, we are called to recognize that this universal destination applies not only to material goods, but also to immaterial and cultural goods.

66. Certainly there is a right to private property, which has its own specific meaning and purpose, yet it is always subordinate to the universal destination of goods.

67. Today, among the goods that are universally intended for everyone, we must also include new forms of property, such as patents, algorithms, digital platforms, technological infrastructure and data. In a context where the wealth of nations depends increasingly on knowledge and technology, when these goods remain concentrated in the hands of a few, without adequate forms of sharing and access, a new imbalance is created that contradicts the universal destination of goods. In turn, it widens the gap between the included and the excluded, between those who can participate in the digital revolution and those who remain on the margins

The principle of subsidiarity

68. The principle of subsidiarity stems from the very same understanding of the human person that has guided our reflection on dignity and the common good. If every woman and man is called to take ownership of his or her own life and to contribute to the formation of society, then social institutions must also respect and support this responsibility. The Social Doctrine of the Church refers to subsidiarity as the principle according to which the role of individuals, families, local communities and intermediary organizations should not be supplanted by higher-level authorities. Moreover, higher-level institutions must recognize, protect and promote the

freedom and creativity of lower-level entities, coordinating their contributions so that they can cooperate effectively for the common good. [91]

69. Starting with Leo XIII and the beginnings of modern social teaching, the Church has insisted that neither the individual nor the family should be subsumed by the State, but should be allowed to act freely, as far as possible, without harming the common good. [92] Saint John Paul II took up and developed this perspective, noting that the political community is at the service of civil society and that the State must protect the common good, intervening when necessary, but without permanently supplanting the responsibilities of intermediary organizations and social institutions. [93] Subsidiarity does not justify the State's disengagement but rather guides its actions. Indeed, public intervention is necessary precisely to enable all social actors to fulfill their mission without being stifled. It is the responsibility of the political community to create the conditions that allow individuals, families, associations and intermediary organizations to fulfil their mission in society, without being replaced or reduced to mere facilitators. [94]

71. The principle of subsidiarity applies especially in the context of the digital revolution. Here, the highest level is not the State, but rather major economic and technological actors that exercise de facto power over the conditions of everyday life. This level, which monopolizes expertise, data and decision-making authority, involves companies and platforms that define conditions for access, rules of visibility, forms of interaction, and even economic opportunities. The principle of subsidiarity requires that such processes not be imposed from above in an opaque and unilateral manner, but instead be directed toward the common good with transparency, accountability and meaningful forms of participation (including independent checks, transparency regarding algorithms, equitable access to data and avenues for recourse). In this context, States and transnational institutions are called to ensure fair rules and effective safeguards

The principle of solidarity

73. Having considered the common good and subsidiarity, I would like to reflect on the principle of solidarity. This emerges from a vision of the human person generated by faith, namely that every human being is created in the image of God and is part of a network of relationships that bind him or her to others, to specific populations and to creation. Solidarity, then, is the concrete recognition that the future of each individual is connected to the future of all; indeed, "no one is saved alone." [99]

75. The Church's social teaching emphasizes that solidarity is both a principle and a virtue. As a principle, it expresses the objective order of relationships among individuals, groups and peoples, pointing to an awareness of interdependence whereby the good of each person depends on the good of others. As a virtue, it requires a "firm and persevering determination" [102] to strive for the common good, with particular attention to those most in need. Pope Francis noted that solidarity is "a way of making history" [103] that creates communities and not

just masses of individuals. For this reason, it requires a modest and shared way of life, the ability to forego immediate benefits in order to create opportunities for others in the future, and a willingness to challenge habits and privileges — including those related to digital consumption and the use of technology — when they prevent others from living with dignity.

The principle of social justice

77. For the Christian community, social justice is a concrete way of following Jesus and remaining faithful to the Gospel. In the New Testament, Jesus proclaims the “good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18) and identifies himself with the lowly, the sick, the imprisoned and strangers (cf. Mt 25:31-46). He thus teaches us that justice is born from, and fulfilled in, fraternity, because the way we approach and relate to the least among us becomes, in concrete terms, the measure of our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters. Justice, however, concerns not only the behaviour of individuals, but also the way in which the structures of society are conceived and organized. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council reminds us that every institution is called to serve the human person and his or her dignity. [105] Social justice is, therefore, characterized by the capacity of a social, economic and political order to allow everyone — particularly the weakest — to live a truly dignified life, without leaving anyone behind.

. In the digital age, a just social order guarantees everyone equal access to opportunities, protects the youngest and weakest members of society, combats hate and misinformation and subjects the use of data and technology to public oversight, so that the guiding principle is not solely profit but the dignity of every person and the common good of all people.

81. A litmus test for social justice today is the treatment of migrants, refugees and those forced to move due to poverty, violence, climate change and environmental disasters. The way a society treats them reveals whether its sense of justice is driven by fear or by the spirit of fraternity. Pope Francis urged us to see migrants not simply as a problem to be managed, but as a living image of the People of God on the move. [109] They are people with dignity, resources and dreams, who have the right to be treated with respect and to ask to become active members of the societies that welcome them. Social justice in this area entails at least two complementary commitments. On the one hand, this means protecting the rightful hopes of those forced to leave by ensuring safe and legal routes, dignified conditions for receiving them, and genuine pathways to integration. On the other hand, it means promoting the right to remain in one’s homeland in peace and security by addressing the root causes that force people to migrate, including those linked to economic injustices and the climate crisis. When these rights are respected, migration can become an opportunity for encounter and mutual enrichment among peoples.

Integral human development

82. In his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI affirmed that development is authentic only if it is “integral,” meaning that it can “foster the development of each man and of the whole man.”[110] In the decades that followed, the Social Doctrine of the Church reprised and reflected on this expression in order to indicate the practical ways in which the noble principles — dignity, the common good, the universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, solidarity and social justice — are implemented in real life. By “integral human development,” we mean a process in which the growth of individuals and peoples encompasses all dimensions of existence and opens the future to subsequent generations as well.

85. Seen in this light, integral human development is the framework through which we can interpret the changes of our time, including those brought about by the digital revolution. Technological innovations, including artificial intelligence, are not neutral, for they can either foster participation and justice or exacerbate inequality, control and exclusion. For this reason, they must be evaluated by asking a crucial question: Do they truly help individuals and peoples to become more humane and fraternal, while respecting our common home and future generations? It is here that the principles of Social Doctrine become concrete criteria for discernment regarding the issues which we will address in the following chapters.