

THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

For more than a century the Catholics have analysed the issues of life in society to propose fundamental principles, to define judgement criteria and suggest concrete guidelines. This whole thought is called “Catholic social doctrine”.

***Centesimus annus* (1991), n° 54:**

“(…) *the Church's social teaching is itself a valid instrument of evangelization. As such, it proclaims God and his mystery of salvation in Christ to every human being, and for that very reason reveals man to himself. In this light, and only in this light, does it concern itself with everything else: the human rights (...), the family and education, the duties of the State, (...).*”

The social doctrine doesn't offer technical solutions to the different challenges. It analyses the economic or sociopolitical mechanisms and denounces inhuman situations, calls for change and outlines societal objectives which we must strive for. This doctrine is not fixed but always in evolution. It is implemented in various ways: the relationship of a person with authorities; international, national economic relations; peace issues; and more recently the relation between man and nature.

Short history

1. **Leon XIII – *Rerum Novarum*** (1891): This is the origin of a new movement within the Church. One realises that the solution to social issues concerns everybody. The encyclical promotes the development of a true creativity by mobilising the procedures of representative democracy. One witnesses the creation of Catholic social institutions: trade unions and social secretariats. The underlying conviction of this is that the Gospel is not only a “Good News” for the personal life and private sphere, but also for the organisation of the society structures.
2. **Pius XI – *Quadragesimo Anno*** (1931): It stipulates the great principles structuring the social doctrine, like the principle of subsidiarity.
3. **John XXIII – *Mater et Magistra*** (1961).
4. **II Vatican Council** (1962 to 1965) – ***Gaudium et Spes*** (1965): In the light of the Gospel, the Christians are invited to find the sense of present events and situations (mainly through learning to scrutinize and interpret “the signs of the times”), to highlight the Christian and human values involved in the considered situations and contexts, and to experiment innovative solutions.
5. **Paul VI – *Octogesima Adveniens*** (apostolic letter, 1971).
6. **John-Paul II – *Laborem Exercens*** (1981) and ***Centesimus Annus*** (1991).
7. **Benedict XVI – *Caritas in Veritate*** (2009): In this encyclical letter, the Pope introduces the idea of gratuity and gift. He reminds there is a space for gratuity, non-profit exchange, even within the market economies. Otherwise, that will provoke an incomplete and unequal human development.

The social doctrine has had a great influence on the great thinkers of the 20th century. In France: Emmanuel MOUNIER (1905-1950), Jacques MARITAIN (1882-1973) and Yves R. SIMON (1903-1961). In Germany: Oswald von NELL-BREUNING (1890-1991) and Romano GUARDINI (1885-1968). Today, we can mention: William T. CAVANAUGH, Donald DORR, David HOLLENBACH, Ian LINDEN and Paul VALLELY. In Belgium (KUL): Johan VERSTRAETEN. In the Netherlands: Wim van de DONK.

Christians are called to bring their own contribution to the social doctrine, to humanise social life. They give an additional significance to all human activities by referring these to God who reveals Himself in history. The teaching and dissemination of the social doctrine are part of the evangelisation mission of the Church.

The social doctrine proposes reflection guidelines for facing the problems of any time and this at three levels. Firstly, the main principles: solidarity, subsidiarity, common good; then, judgement criteria, very present in the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* of Benedict XVI; and finally, directives for action.

FIRST PART
AN INTEGRAL AND SOLIDARY HUMANISM

The title itself is interesting: “AN INTEGRAL AND SOLIDARY HUMANISM”. It expresses a whole programme. It concerns a humanism which embraces the entire humanity and wants to express solidarity with all men.

N° 1 *“The Church continues to speak to all people and all nations, for it is only in the name of Christ that salvation is given to men and women.”*

We are invited to place our life and the world under the sign of the Paschal event.

“Salvation, which the Lord Jesus obtained “at a price” (1 Cor 6:20; cf. 1 Pet 1:18-19), is achieved in the new life that awaits the righteous after death, but it also permeates this world in the realities of the economy and labour, of technology and communications, of society and politics, of the international community and the relations among cultures and peoples.”

We could add: education.

N° 3 *“To the people of our time, her travelling companions, the Church also offers her social doctrine.”* I would like to underline the terms “travelling companions”. The text indicates that the Christian must feel solidarity with men and women of his/her time. We all are “travelling companions”, and this presence with the people is developed through solidarity actions and through words, too.

Farther, we read:

“This doctrine has its own profound unity, which flows from Faith in a whole and complete salvation, from Hope in a fullness of justice, and from Love which makes all mankind truly brothers and sisters in Christ.”

The “whole and complete salvation” not only concerns life after death but also the present world. And at the same time, “love which make all mankind truly brothers and sisters in Christ”: the Christian is thus called to testify to God who has loved the world in Jesus Christ (Jn 3:16).

N° 4 *“Discovering that they are loved by God, people come to understand their own transcendent dignity, they learn not to be satisfied with only themselves but to encounter their neighbour in a network of relationships that are ever more authentically human.”*

The first message from an educator to a child is thus: “you are loved by God”. This message gives men and women their true human and superior dignity. So the pupil will learn not to be self-sufficient but to meet the other in a network of truly human relationships. The school is one of those places in which young people grow up – together – in humanity, certain that they are loved by God. That’s in brief the whole programme of the Catholic school.

“This is the perspective that allows every person of good will to perceive the broad horizons of justice and human development in truth and goodness.”

“Men and women who are made “new” by the love of God are able to change the rules and the quality of relationships, transforming even social structures. They are people capable of bringing peace where there is conflict, of building and nurturing fraternal relationships where there is hatred, of seeking justice where there prevails the exploitation of man by man. Only love is capable of radically transforming the relationships that men maintain among themselves.”

This new spirit of Christ is thus necessary to enter in a liberating way into human relationships.

We can meet a lot of opposition from outside but also from inside our communities. Let’s think about a management which is only economic without taking interest in the conditions of the human encounter or in rest moments.

N° 5 In N° 4 and N° 5, we see that the social doctrine of the Church has a theological starting point: man is loved by God, man is liberated and free (free “from” and free “to”). The believer, of whom the cross of Christ has opened the eyes, is capable to look with new eyes the needs of the world, and to act. (Need for justice, work, respect, food, alphabetization, health, home, companionship, social integration, peace, respect of human rights.)

N° 6 “*Christian love leads to denunciation, proposals and a commitment to cultural and social projects; it prompts positive activity that inspires all who sincerely have the good of man at heart to make their contribution.*”

The destiny of humanity requires joint acceptance of responsibility, inspired by an integral and shared humanism. How to transform this programme into an educational project which mobilises the whole educational community to collaborate in a creative way? The inspiration being an integral and united humanism shows us that the way to be a Christian-in-the-world consists in promoting the humanity of the whole man in solidarity.

N° 13 “*At the service of the full truth about man*

This document is an act of service on the part of the Church to the women and men of our time (...). In this perspective, the Church is ‘inspired by no earthly ambition and seeks but one solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit. For Christ entered this world to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served’¹”

The Church emphasises its will to be at the service of the world.

N° 14 “*By means of the present document, the Church intends to offer a contribution of truth to the question of man's place in nature and in human society, a question faced by civilizations and cultures in which expressions of human wisdom are found.*”

What strikes is the “inclusive” character of this paragraph. The document is rooted in the one thousand years old man’s search. What’s the place of the universe, of human conviviality? What’s the sense of existence and of the mystery that surrounds it? What will there be after this life? For us, educators, these questions have their place in the educational project of our schools. The way the document indicates is to look for what is determining for human dignity in the “*civilizations and cultures in which expressions of human wisdom are found*”.

Civilizations and cultures are “*manifesting themselves in forms of religion, philosophy and poetic genius of every time and of every people (...)*”.

The document mentions some fundamental questions of human life: “*Who am I? Why is there pain, evil, death, despite all the progress that has been made? What is the value of so many accomplishments if the cost has been unbearable? What will there be after this life?*”

The way indicated by the Church is to walk with the people, to accompany them in their questioning.

If we want to go to meet young people, we must consider their questions seriously. Search what they search, understand their joys and sorrows. Ask their questions in the spirit of Christian faith.

The CONCLUSION of this first part – N° 19 – underlines the “*integral and solidary humanism*”. Such humanism must be “*capable of creating a new social, economic and political order, founded on the dignity and freedom of every human person, to be brought about in peace, justice and solidarity*”.

¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 3: AAS 58 (1966), 1027.

SECOND PART
PRINCIPLES OF THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL DOCTRINE

- N° 160 *“The permanent principles of the Church's social doctrine constitute the very heart of Catholic social teaching. These are the principles of: the dignity of the human person, (...) which is the foundation of all the other principles and content of the Church's social doctrine; the common good; subsidiarity; and solidarity. (...)”*
- N° 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.”*
- N° 162 *“(...) A deep theoretical understanding and the actual application (...) of these social principles clearly shows the reciprocity, complementarities and interconnectedness that is part of their structure. (...)”*
- N° 163 *“The principles of the social doctrine (...) constitute that primary articulation of the truth of society (...). These principles have a profoundly moral significance because they refer to the ultimate and organizational foundations of life in society.”*

1. PRINCIPLE OF THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

All the other principles and contents of the Church's social doctrine are based on this principle of the “*inviolable dignity of the human person*”.² When the Church “*fulfills her mission of proclaiming the Gospel, she bears witness to man, in the name of Christ, to his dignity and his vocation to the communion of persons*”.³ The Church wishes to protect this human dignity from any attempt to propose a simplistic or distorted image of it.

A. The human person “*imago Dei*”

- N° 133 The human person is a creature of God and has as distinctive and specific character the fact to be in the image of God. “*Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.*”⁴ As person, man is “*an active and responsible subject of his own growth process, together with the community to which he belongs*”.
- We thus can see that human dignity challenges men and women to use their talents. But, at the same time, it implies a responsibility, for oneself and for the others, to guarantee freedom for all people.

B. The respect of human dignity

- N° 133 *“In no case is the human person to be manipulated for ends that are foreign to his own development, which can find complete fulfilment only in God and his plan of salvation (...). Man cannot “be subjected to unjust restrictions in the exercise of their rights and freedom”.* “*The person cannot be a means for carrying out economic, social or political projects imposed by some authority (...).*”

² John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961), 453, 459.

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2419.

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 357.

C. The equal dignity of all people

N° 144 “(...) all people have the same dignity as creatures made in his image and likeness. (...) “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁵ Moreover, this is the ultimate foundation of the radical equality and brotherhood among all people, regardless of their race, nation, sex, origin, culture, or class.”

D. The whole person and all men

If the person is the criterion, the objective of any development must be the whole man and all men.⁶ We must aim at a plenary and integral humanism.

The whole man

For Pope Paul VI (*Mater et Magistra*, 1961), the “integral development” of the person goes through the recognition of the spiritual dimension of the person. Paul VI, in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967), doesn’t use the word “*incrementum*” (growth) but rather “*progressio*” (development). He doesn’t want to reduce development to its quantitative aspects. Paul VI presents it as the “*transition from less than human conditions*” (material and moral poverty, oppressive structures) “*to truly human conditions*” (acquisition of life's necessities, acquisition of knowledge and culture, growing awareness of other people's dignity, acknowledgement of the highest values and God Himself, Christian life of faith, hope and charity). According to Benedict XVI, the core of the problem is man without God. Man needs transcendence. There are no human rights if religious freedom is threatened.

This integral development is disturbing because the Church states that no area of human activity can escape from ethical responsibility.

All men

Considering the growth rate of our countries, we must ask ourselves following questions: growth for whom? Is it really a human development?

E. Human rights

N° 155 The respect of human dignity implies that public authorities guarantee the effective implementation of human rights.

“In a certain sense, the source and synthesis of these rights is religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in conformity with one's transcendent dignity as a person”⁷

N° 157 “The field of human rights has expanded to include the rights of peoples and nations (...) : The rights of nations are nothing but “‘human rights' fostered at the specific level of community life”.

- The “right to independence”
- The “fundamental right to existence”
- The right to “its own language and culture”
- The right to “shape its life according to its own traditions, excluding, of course, every abuse of basic human rights and in particular the oppression of minorities”
- The right to “build its future by providing an appropriate education for the younger generation”.

⁵ Ga 3 :28.

⁶ Words of Father LEBRET, repeated by Paul VI.

⁷ John-Paul II, Encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus*, 47, AAS 83 (1991) 851-852.

F. The dignity of the worker and of human work

N° 261 to 272 The social teaching of the Church promotes the dignity of human work and the dignity of the worker in his work. From a theological point of view, work is understood as an act continuing the creation of God, an act of creation through which the human being, image of God, works the world in order to make it really human.

So, work has a twofold significance, depending on whether we consider what it produces or who performs it.

In the “*objective dimension*” of work, the question is to know if it really contributes to the edification of a world more human for all.

In its “*subjective dimension*”, the question is to see to what extent work, in its concrete conditions, makes the worker capable of self-realisation.⁸

This concept of work also promotes formation: each person has the right to maintain his/her skills or to acquire new knowledge.

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF THE COMMON GOOD

N° 164 This principle “*stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people*”.

A. Meaning and primary implications

What do we mean by “common good”?

N° 164 “*The sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily (...)*”⁹

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.”

N° 165 “*The human person cannot find fulfillment in himself, that is, apart from the fact that he exists ‘with’ others and ‘for’ others. This truth does (...) require 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, (etc.) — can escape the issue of its own common good (...)*”

B. Responsibility of everyone for the common good

N° 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. 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.”*

⁸ John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 1961, n° 65.

John XXIII gives a new orientation to the Thomist perspective. For Thomas Aquinas, the common good is firstly the good of the whole (the Nation, the Church) to which must be submitted (and sacrificed) the particular good of individuals. John XXIII re-balances the notion from the person, then one also adds the human groups.

⁹ According to John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens*, n° 9, man “*achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes more a human being*”.

C. Universal destination of goods and private property

N° 176 *“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”¹⁰.”*

D. The preferential option for the poor

N° 182 It seems good to repeat a word used by John Paul II: *“solicitude”*. It means compassion for the other who suffers; the fact to feel personally concerned by the other with a real concern for what he/she lives and with the will to help him/her. When our heart is affected, we are encouraged to intervene, to act in order to change things. PASTEUR said: *“I don’t ask you what is your opinion or what is your religion, but what is your suffering”*. In the implementation of the interpretation and discernment key constituted by the common good, for the Christian, we need to bring into play a specific criterion of evangelical inspiration: the priority choice for the poor or *“the preferential option for the poor”*. This is actually a choice and an option. It is a conscious will to look social reality from a particular point of view: the one of the poor, the weak, the underprivileged.

III. THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY

N° 186 Definition

“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 (...) 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”¹¹

Attitudes of help (“*subsidium*”)

*“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.”*

On the other hand, the inferior level refrains to off-load the tasks it is capable to accomplish onto the superior level. In this way, the dignity, existential space, freedom, initiative and responsibility of the intermediate social entities are respected.

N° 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.”*

Concrete indications

This principle implies the adequate recognition *“of private initiative — in economic matters also (...). 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 (...); 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.”*

¹⁰ *Gaudium et spes*, 71: AAS 58 (1966) 1092-1093.

¹¹ Pius XI, Encyclical letter *Quadragesimo Anno* AAS 23 (1931) 203.

N° 188 Discernment criteria

“(…) the common good correctly understood, the demands of which will never in any way be contrary to the defense and promotion of the primacy of the person (…) must remain the criteria for making decisions concerning the application of the principle of subsidiarity.”

N° 189 Implication of the principle of subsidiarity: participation

“The characteristic implication of subsidiarity is participation, which is expressed (…) in a series of activities by means of which the citizen (…) contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he belongs. Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good.”

N° 190 *“Participation (…) is also one of the pillars of all democratic orders. (…) 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.”*

We must underline here the role of an “open, transparent and regular dialogue”.

N° 191 Role of education

“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.”

IV. THE PRINCIPLE OF SOLIDARITY

A. Significance and values

N° 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 (...).*

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, (...). 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.”

B. Solidarity as a social principle and a moral virtue

N° 193 *“(These) 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:

- (1) that of a social principle*
- (2) and that of a moral virtue.*

- (1) “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’¹² 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.”*

¹² Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1939-1941.

- (2) “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”.”
(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”.)

C. Solidarity and the common growth of mankind

N° 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.”

N° 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 liveable, and because of the indivisible and indispensable legacy constituted by culture, scientific and technical knowledge, material and immaterial goods and by all that the human condition has produced.”

D. Solidarity in the life and message of Jesus Christ

N° 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 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: “In the light of faith, solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the specifically Christian dimensions of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation” (...).”

As a **CONCLUSION** of this second part: the social doctrine of the Church considers legitimate to associate charity to justice, then solidarity to charity.

THIRD PART

THE FUNDAMENTAL VALUES OF SOCIAL LIFE: TRUTH – FREEDOM – JUSTICE

I. TRUTH

N° 198 “Men and women have the specific duty to move always towards the truth, to respect it and bear responsible witness to it. 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.”

Truth, above all, of the human person, his/her dignity and rights. Truth also in coherence between the commitments made, the declarations and public communications, and the actual practice.

Education

“Modern times call for an intensive educational effort and a corresponding commitment on the part of all so that the quest for truth (...) will be encouraged in every sector (...).”

II. FREEDOM

- N° 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.¹³ (...) 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”¹⁴.”*
- N° 200 *“The value of freedom (...) is respected when every member of society is permitted to fulfil his personal vocation (...) in a manner characterized by responsibility. (...) 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.”*

III. JUSTICE

- N° 201 *“Justice (...) “consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbour”¹⁵.”*
It can be considered from a subjective or an objective point of view: *“From a subjective point of view, justice is translated into behaviour 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 inter-subjective and social sphere.”*
We though must be aware that there are tensions between these values: if we make one of the words absolute, we do it at the detriment of the others. The difficult question is to define in concrete situations the best balance; which is always a compromise.
- N° 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.”*
- N° 203 *“The full truth about man makes it possible 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”¹⁶. In fact, the Church's social doctrine places alongside the value of justice that of solidarity (...). ‘Opus solidaritatis pax’, peace as the fruit of solidarity”¹⁷. The goal of peace, in fact, “will (...) be achieved through the putting into effect of social and international justice, but also through the practice of the virtues which favour 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”¹⁸.”*

IV. SOURCE OF THESE THREE VALUES: LOVE (CHARITY)¹⁹

- N° 204 *“Love (cannot be) 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”²⁰.”*

¹³ *Gaudium et spes*, 17 : AAS 58 (1966) 1037-1038.

¹⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia*, 26: AAS 79 (1987), 564-565.

¹⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1807.

¹⁶ John Paul II, Message for the 2004 World Day of Peace, 10: AAS 96 (2004), 121.

¹⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39: AAS 80 (1988), 568.

¹⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39: AAS 80 (1988), 568.

¹⁹ « Charity », a word often used to translate the Greek « *agapè* ».

²⁰ Cf. John-Paul II: “*justice must find its fulfilment in charity*” (Message for the Word Day of Peace, 2004).

N° 205 *“It is from the inner wellspring of love that the values of truth, freedom and justice are born and grow.”*

N° 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.”*

FOURTH PART **SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND ECCLESIAL ACTION**

I. FAMILY

A. Parents and educational institutions

N° 240 *“Parents are the first educators, not the only educators, of their children. It belongs to them, therefore, to exercise with responsibility their educational activity in close and vigilant cooperation with civil and ecclesial agencies. “Man's community aspect itself — both civil and ecclesial — demands and leads to a broader and more articulated activity resulting from well-ordered collaboration between the various agents of education. All these agents are necessary, even though each can and should play its part in accordance with the special competence and contribution proper to itself”.²¹ Parents have the right to choose the formative tools that respond to their convictions and to seek those means that will help them best to fulfil their duty as educators, in the spiritual and religious sphere also. Public authorities have the duty to guarantee this right and to ensure the concrete conditions necessary for it to be exercised.²² In this context, cooperation between the family and scholastic institutions takes on primary importance.”*

B. Private schools and financial support

N° 241 *“Parents have the right to found and support educational institutions. Public authorities must see to it that “public subsidies are so allocated that parents are truly free to exercise this right without incurring unjust burdens. Parents should not have to sustain, directly or indirectly, extra charges which would deny or unjustly limit the exercise of this freedom”.²³ The refusal to provide public economic support to non-public schools that need assistance and that render a service to civil society is to be considered an injustice. “Whenever the State lays claim to an educational monopoly, it oversteps its rights and offends justice ... The State cannot without injustice merely tolerate so-called private schools. Such schools render a public service and therefore have a right to financial assistance”²⁴.”*

C. Family and integral education

N° 242 *“The family has the responsibility to provide an integral education. Indeed, all true education “is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end (...)”.²⁵ This integrality is ensured when children — with the witness of life and in words — are educated in dialogue, encounter, sociality, legality, solidarity and peace, through the cultivation of the fundamental virtues of justice and charity.”*

²¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 40: AAS 74 (1982), 131.

²² Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*, 6: AAS 58 (1966), 733-734; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2229.

²³ Holy See, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, art. 5 b, Vatican Polyglot Press, Vatican City 1983, p. 11; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 5: AAS 58 (1966), 933.

²⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia*, 94: AAS 79 (1987), 595-596.

²⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 43: AAS 74 (1982), 134-135.

II. PASTORAL ACTION IN THE SOCIAL AREA: SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND FORMATION

N° 528 *“The Church's social doctrine is an indispensable reference point for a totally integrated Christian formation.”*

N° 529 *“The formative value of the Church's social doctrine should receive more attention in catechesis.²⁶ Catechesis is the systematic teaching of Christian doctrine in its entirety, with a view to initiating believers into the fullness of Gospel life.²⁷ The ultimate aim of catechesis “is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ”.²⁸ In this way, it becomes possible to recognize the action of the Holy Spirit, from whom comes the gift of new life in Christ.²⁹ Seen in this light, in its service of educating to the faith, the concern of catechesis must not fail “to clarify properly realities such as man's activity for his integral liberation, the search for a society with greater solidarity and fraternity, the fight for justice and the building of peace”.³⁰ In order to do so, the fullness of the social Magisterium must be presented: its history, its content and its methodology. Direct contact with the texts of the social encyclicals, read within an ecclesial context, enriches its reception and application, thanks to the contribution of the different areas of competency and professions represented within the community.”*

N° 530 *“In the context of catechesis above all it is important that the teaching of the Church's social doctrine be directed towards motivating action for the evangelization and humanization of temporal realities. Through this doctrine, in fact, the Church expresses a theoretical and practical knowledge that gives support to the commitment of transforming social life, helping it to conform ever more fully to the divine plan.”*

The lived example

“The witness of a Christian life has an extraordinary formative value: “In particular the life of holiness which is resplendent in so many members of the People of God, humble and often unseen, constitutes the simplest and most attractive way to perceive at once the beauty of truth, the liberating force of God's love, and the value of unconditional fidelity to all the demands of the Lord's law, even in the most difficult circumstances”.³¹”

N° 531 The social doctrine, basis of formation

“The Church's social doctrine must be the basis of an intense and constant work of formation, especially of the lay faithful. Such a formation should take into account their obligations in civil society. “It belongs to the layman, without waiting passively for orders and directives, to take the initiative freely and to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which they live”.³²”

N° 532 *“Catholic educational institutions can and indeed must carry out a precious formative service, dedicating themselves in a particular way to the inculturation of the Christian message, that is to say, to the productive encounter between the Gospel and the various branches of knowledge. The Church's social doctrine is a necessary means for an efficacious Christian education towards love, justice and peace, as well as for a conscious maturation of moral and social duties in the various cultural and professional fields.”*

²⁶ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 30, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1997, pp. 30-32.

²⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, 18: AAS 71 (1979), 1291-1292.

²⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, 5: AAS 71 (1979), 1281.

²⁹ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 54, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1997, p. 54.

³⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, 29: AAS 71 (1979), 1301-1302; cf. also Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 17, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1997, p. 21.

³¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendoris*, 107: AAS 85 (1993), 1217.

³² Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 81: AAS 59 (1967), 296-297.

III. SOCIAL ACTION AND COMMITMENT FOR EDUCATION

A. The lay faithful

N° 541 *“The essential characteristic of the lay faithful who work in the Lord's vineyard (cf. Mt 20:1-16) is the secular nature of their Christian discipleship, which is carried out precisely in the world.”*

N° 542 *“The identity of the lay faithful is born in and nourished by the sacraments (...). Lay Catholics are disciples of Christ starting with the sacraments, that is, by virtue of what God has wrought in them, marking them with the very image of his Son Jesus Christ. It is from this divine gift of grace, and not from human concession, that is born the threefold ‘munus’ (gift and duty) that characterizes the lay person as prophet, priest and king, according to his secular nature.”*

N° 543 Witness

“It is the proper duty of the lay faithful to proclaim the Gospel with an exemplary witness of life rooted in Christ and lived in temporal realities: the family; professional commitment in the world of work, culture, science and research; the exercise of social, economic and political responsibilities. All secular human realities (...) are places where God's love is received; the commitment of the lay faithful must correspond to this vision and is to be considered an expression of evangelical charity.”

N° 544 *“The witness of the lay faithful is born from the gift of grace, recognized, nurtured and brought to maturity.³³ This motivation makes their commitment in the world significant (...). Standards of living and greater economic productivity are not the only valid indicators for measuring the total fulfilment of the human person in this life, and they are of even less value when considering the life to come, “for man's horizons are not bounded only by the temporal order; living on the level of human history, he preserves the integrity of his eternal destiny”³⁴.”*

B. Spirituality of the lay faithful

N° 545 *“The lay faithful are called to cultivate an authentic lay spirituality by which they are reborn as new men and women, both sanctified and sanctifiers, immersed in the mystery of God and inserted in society. Such a spirituality will build up the world according to Jesus' Spirit. It will make people capable of looking beyond history, without separating themselves from it, of cultivating a passionate love for God without looking away from their brothers and sisters, whom they are able to see as the Lord sees them and love as the Lord loves them. (...) Prompted by such a spirituality, the lay faithful are able to contribute “to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their own life...³⁵ they must manifest Christ to others”*

N° 546 Harmony between life and faith

“The lay faithful must strengthen their spiritual and moral lives, becoming ever more competent in carrying out their social duties. A deepening of interior motivations and the acquisition of a style appropriate for their work in the social and political spheres are the results of a dynamic and ongoing formation directed above all to the attainment of harmony between life, in all its complexity, and faith. In the experience of believers, in fact, “there cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called ‘spiritual’ life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called ‘secular’ life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture”³⁶.”

³³ Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 24: AAS 81 (1989), 433-435.

³⁴ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 76: AAS 58 (1966), 1099.

³⁵ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 31: AAS 57 (1965), 37-38.

³⁶ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifidelis Laici*, 59: AAS 81 (1989), 509.

Bringing faith and life together requires following the path judiciously indicated by the characteristic elements of Christian living: the Word of God as a reference point; the liturgical celebration of the Christian Mystery; personal prayer; the authentic experience of Church enhanced by the particular formational services of discerning spiritual guides; the exercise of the social virtues and a persevering commitment to cultural and professional formation.”

C. Acting with prudence

N° 547 *“The lay faithful should act according to the dictates of prudence, the virtue that makes it possible to discern the true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means for achieving it. Thanks to this virtue, moral principles are applied correctly to particular cases. We can identify three distinct moments as prudence is exercised*

- (1) *to clarify and evaluate situations,*
- (2) *to inspire decisions*
- (3) *and to prompt action.*

The first moment is seen in the reflection and consultation by which the question is studied and the necessary opinions sought. The second moment is that of evaluation, as the reality is analyzed and judged in the light of God's plan. The third moment, that of decision, is based on the preceding steps and makes it possible to choose between the different actions that may be taken.”

N° 548 *“Prudence makes it possible to make decisions that are consistent, and to make them with realism and a sense of responsibility for the consequences of one's action. The rather widespread opinion that equates prudence with shrewdness, with utilitarian calculations, with diffidence or with timidity or indecision, is far from the correct understanding of this virtue. It is a characteristic of practical reason and offers assistance in deciding with wisdom and courage the course of action that should be followed, becoming the measure of the other virtues. Prudence affirms the good as a duty and shows in what manner the person should accomplish it.³⁷ In the final analysis, it is a virtue that requires the mature exercise of thought and responsibility in an objective understanding of a specific situation and in making decisions according to a correct will.”*

The exercise of prudence calls for a progressive formation in order to acquire the necessary qualities: “memory” as the capacity to remember one's own past experience with objectivity, without falsification (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae, II-II, q. 49, a. 1: Ed. Leon. 8, 367); “docilitas” (docility) that allows one to learn from others and to profit from their experience on the basis of an authentic love for truth (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae, II-II, q. 49, a. 3: Ed. Leon. 8, 368- 369); “solertia” (diligence), that is, the ability to face the unexpected with objectivity in order to turn every situation to the service of good, overcoming the temptation of intemperance, injustice, and cowardice (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae, II-II, q. 49, a. 4: Ed. Leon. 8, 369-370). These cognitive dispositions permit the development of the necessary conditions for the moment of decision: “providencia” (foresight), which is the capacity of weighing the efficacy of a given conduct for the attainment of a moral end (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae, II-II, q. 49, a. 6: Ed. Leon. 8, 371) and “circumspectio” (circumspection), or the capacity of weighing the circumstances that contribute to the creation of the situation in which a given action will be carried out (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae, II-II, q. 49, a. 7: Ed. Leon. 8, 372). In the social context, prudence can be specified under two particular forms: “regnative” prudence, that is, the capacity to order all things for the greatest good of society (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae, II-II, q. 50, a. 1: Ed. Leon. 8, 374), and “political” prudence, which leads citizens to obey, carrying out the indications of authority (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae, II-II, q. 50, a. 2: Ed. Leon. 8, 375), without compromising their dignity as a human person (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae, II-II, qq. 47-56: Ed. Leon. 8, 348-406).

³⁷ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1806.

D. Social doctrine and associative experience

N° 549 *“The Church's social doctrine must become an integral part of the ongoing formation of the lay faithful.”*

N° 550 *“The various specialized associations that gather people together in the name of their Christian vocation and mission within a particular professional or cultural field have a precious role to play in forming mature Christians. (For example: the Catholic associations of teachers). (...) In this context, the Church's social doctrine shows that it is an effective means for forming individual consciences and a country's culture.”*

E. Service in the various sectors of social life

N° 551 *“The presence of the laity in social life is characterized by service, the sign and expression of love, which is seen in the areas of the family, culture, work, economics and politics according to specific aspects:*

- (1) *Service to the human person,*
- (2) *Service in culture.”*

(1) Service to the human person

N° 552 *“Among the areas of the social commitment of the laity, service to the human person emerges as a priority. Promoting the dignity of every person (...).*

The first form in which this task is undertaken consists in the commitment and efforts to renew oneself interiorly (...). The internal “renewal of the Christian spirit”³⁸ must precede the commitment to improve society “according to the mind of the Church on the firmly established basis of social justice and social charity”³⁹.

It is from the conversion of hearts that there arises concern for others, loved as brothers or sisters. This concern helps us to understand the obligation and commitment to heal institutions, structures and conditions of life that are contrary to human dignity. The laity must therefore work at the same time for the conversion of hearts and the improvement of structures, taking historical situations into account and using legitimate means so that the dignity of every man and woman will be truly respected and promoted within institutions.”

N° 553 *“Promoting human dignity implies above all affirming the inviolability of the right to life, from conception to natural death, the first among all rights and the condition for all other rights of the person.⁴⁰ Respect for personal dignity requires, moreover, that the religious dimension of the person be recognized. “This is not simply a requirement ‘concerning matters of faith’, but a requirement that finds itself inextricably bound up with the very reality of the individual”.⁴¹ The effective recognition of the right to freedom of conscience and religious freedom is one of the highest goods and one of the most serious duties of every people that truly wishes to ensure the good of the individual and of society.⁴² In the present cultural context, there is a particularly urgent need to defend marriage and the family (...).”*

³⁸ Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931), 218.

³⁹ Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931), 218.

⁴⁰ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum Vitae*, (22 February 1987): AAS 80 (1988), 70-102.

⁴¹ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 39: AAS 81 (1989), 466.

⁴² Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 39: AAS 81 (1989), 466.

(2) Service in culture

N° 554 *“Culture must represent a privileged area for the presence and commitment of the Church and individual Christians. (...)*

All of (the) phenomena (of daily life) must be understood in their cultural aspects and placed in relation to the central issue of the human person, of integral human growth, of the human capacity to communicate and relate with other people, and of the constant human search for an answer to the great questions that run throughout life. It must be kept in mind that “culture is that through which man, as man, becomes more man, ‘is’ more, has more access to ‘being’.”⁴³

(3) Service in politics: the principle of autonomy (“laity”)

N° 571 *“The political commitment of Catholics is often placed in the context of the “autonomy” of the State, that is, the distinction between the political and religious spheres. This distinction is (...) recognized by the Catholic Church (...). Catholic moral doctrine, however, clearly rejects the prospects of an autonomy that is understood as independence from the moral law (...).”*

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith defines autonomy/laity as follows: “Such ‘autonomy’ refers first of all to the attitude of the person who respects the truths that derive from natural knowledge regarding man’s life in society, even if such truths may also be taught by a specific religion, because truth is one”⁴⁴

“A sincere quest for the truth, using legitimate means to promote and defend the moral truths concerning social life — justice, freedom, respect for life and for other human rights — is a right and duty of all members of a social and political community. (...) The Church (...) does not fail to observe the requirements of a correctly understood autonomy (...). Instead, it intends (...) to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful (...) so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good.”

N° 572 *“The principle of autonomy involves respect for every religious confession on the part of the State, which “assures the free exercise of ritual, spiritual, cultural and charitable activities by communities of believers. In a pluralistic society, secularity is a place for communication between the different spiritual traditions and the nation”⁴⁵ (...) “The marginalization of Christianity would not bode well for the future of society or for consensus among peoples; indeed, it would threaten the very spiritual and cultural foundations of civilization”⁴⁶.”*

(4) Social doctrine and democracy

N° 406 *“(...) Authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person. It requires that the necessary conditions be present for the advancement both of the individual through education and formation in true ideals, and of the ‘subjectivity’ of society through the creation of structures of participation and shared responsibility”⁴⁷*

⁴³ John Paul II, Address to UNESCO (2 June 1980), 7: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 23 June 1980, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (24 November 2002), 6: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2002, p. 11.

⁴⁵ John Paul II, Address to the Diplomatic Corps (12 January 2004), 3: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 21 January 2004, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (24 November 2002), 6: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2002, p. 14.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 46: AAS 83 (1991), 850.

(5) Right to a free and open school

N° 557 “The social and political involvement of the lay faithful in the area of culture moves today in specific directions. The first is that of seeking to guarantee the right of each person to a human and civil culture “in harmony with the dignity of the human person, without distinction of race, sex, nation, religion, or social circumstances”.⁴⁸ This right implies the right of families and persons to free and open schools; freedom of access to the means of social communication together with the avoidance of all forms of monopolies and ideological control of this field; freedom of research, sharing one's thoughts, debate and discussion. At the root of the poverty of so many peoples are also various forms of cultural deprivation and the failure to recognize cultural rights. The commitment to the education and formation of the person has always represented the first concern of Christian social action.”

CONCLUSION

The Church doesn't have a political, economic or social mission. Its mission is primarily religious: it consists in giving witness to the power of renewal of inter-individual and social links, generated by charity.

The social doctrine above all states that mutual love between human beings, in the sight of God, is the most powerful instrument of change at the personal and social levels. In fact, it develops a critical process with the tendencies of our world in its relations to possession, power and knowledge.

Beyond this critical aspect, the social doctrine seeks to contribute to the formation of an *ethos*, that is to say, a set of references and practical attitudes susceptible to guide the action of Christians. To that purpose, it draws from its own tradition (Scriptures, history, theology, philosophy) and integrates the advances of human knowledge. It then places man under the horizon of the divine promise of a reign of justice and peace, and appeals to his responsibility.

The credibility of the Church in social matters is to be found in its ability to launch initiatives, to develop new practices, to create innovative institutions which express the concept of man promoted in its teaching. If this were not the case, the social doctrine of the Church should be to class as an ideology.

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Brussels, 2011

⁴⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 60: AAS 58 (1966), 1081.