



Genuine solidarity and subsidiarity

Speech that Benedict XVI addressed to the participants of the 14th plenary session (Vatican, 2-6 May) of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, to receive them in audience.

By: Benedict XVI | Source: fluvium.org

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and the priesthood,

Ladies and gentlemen:

I am pleased to have the opportunity to meet you during your 14th plenary session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. In the last twenty years, the Academy has offered a precious contribution to deepening and developing the social doctrine of the Church and its application in the areas of law, economics, politics and other social sciences. I thank Professor Margaret Archer for the kind words of greeting that she has addressed to me and I express my sincere appreciation for the profuse commitment to research, dialogue, and teaching so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ can continue to illuminate complex situations of this world in swift change.

In the election of the theme "pursuing the common good: how solidarity and subsidiarity can work together", you have decided to examine the interrelation of four fundamental principles of Catholic social doctrine: the dignity of the human person, the common good, the subsidiarity and solidarity (compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 160-163). These key realities, which emerge from the direct contact between the Gospel and the specific social circumstances, constitute a basis for identifying and confronting the imperatives of humanity at the dawn of the 21st century, such as the reduction of inequalities in distribution of goods, the extension of educational opportunities, the promotion of growth and sustainable development and the protection of the environment.

How can solidarity and subsidiarity work together in the pursuit of the common good in a way that not only respects human dignity but also allows it to prosper? This is the main point you are interested in. As your preliminary debates have already demonstrated, a satisfactory response may arise only after a careful examination of the meaning of the terms (cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Chapter 4). Human dignity is an intrinsic value of the person created in

the image and likeness of God and redeemed in Christ. The whole of the social conditions that allow people to be collectively and individually is the common good.

Solidarity is the virtue that allows the human family to share fully the treasure of material and spiritual goods and the subsidiarity is the coordination of the activities of the society in support of the internal life of the local communities. However, these definitions are only the beginning and can only be properly understood if they are linked organically to each other and are considered as reciprocal support. At the beginning we can outline the interconnections between these four principles, placing the dignity of the person at the point of intersection of two axes, a horizontal one, representing "solidarity" and "subsidiarity", and a vertical one, which represents the "common good". This creates a field in which we can draw the various points of catholic social doctrine that form the common good.

While this graphic analogy gives us an approximate image of how these principles are essential to one another and are necessarily interconnected, we know that reality is more complex. Indeed, the unfathomable depths of the human person and the wonderful capacity of the humanity of spiritual communion, realities that are fully revealed only through divine revelation, far outweigh the possibility of schematic representation. In any case, the solidarity that unites the human family and the levels of subsidiarity that reinforce it from within must always be placed on the horizon of the mysterious life of the God One and Triune (cf. Jn! 5, 26; 6, 57), in whom we perceive a shared ineffable love by equal, albeit distinct persons (cfr. Summa Theologiae, I, Q. 42).

Friends: I invite you to allow these fundamental truths to soak up your reflections: not only in the sense that the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity are undoubtedly enriched by our faith in the Trinity, but in particular in the sense that such principles have the potential to situate men and women in the path leading to the discovery of their ultimate and supernatural destiny. The natural human inclination to live in community is confirmed and transformed by the "unity of the Spirit" that God has bestowed upon his adopted daughters and children (cf. Ef 4, 3; 1 P 3, 8). Consequently, the responsibility of Christians to work for peace and justice and their irrevocable commitment for the common good are inseparable of His mission to proclaim the gift of eternal life, to which God has called every man and woman. In this regard, the *tranquillitas ordinis* [tranquility in order. Ndt] of which Saint Augustine speaks refers to "all things", both "civil peace", which is "concord among citizens", and the "peace of the celestial city", which is "harmonious and ordained enjoyment of God, and reciprocal in God" (De Civitate Dei, XIX, 13).

The eyes of faith allow us to see that the earthly and celestial cities are penetrated and intrinsically ordained to each other as soon as they belong to God, the Father, who is "above all, acts by means of all and is present at all" (Ef 4, 6). At the same time, faith is more evidence of the legitimate autonomy of earthly realities that have received "the very stability, truth, goodness, their laws, and their order"

(Gaudium et spes, n. 36).

Therefore be assured that your debates will be at the service of all people of goodwill and that at the same time will inspire Christians to more promptly fulfil their duty to improve solidarity with their own fellow citizens and among themselves and act on the basis of the principle of solidarity, promoting family life, voluntary associations, private initiative and public order that facilitates the proper functioning of the basic communities of society (cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, N. 187).

When we examine the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity in the light of the Gospel, we understand that they are not simply "horizontal": both have an essential vertical dimension. Jesus exhorts us to do! Others what we would like to be done to us (cf. Lc 6, 31), to love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Mt 22, 35). These commandments are inscribed by the Creator in human nature (cf. Deus caritas est, n. 31). Jesus teaches that this love exhorts us to dedicate our lives to the good of others (cf. Jn 15, 12-13). In this sense, authentic solidarity, although it begins with the recognition of the equal value of the other, is done only when I voluntarily put my life in the service of the other (Cfr Ef 6, 21). This is the "vertical" dimension of solidarity: I am driven to make myself less than the other to meet your needs (cf. Jn 13, 14-15), precisely as Jesus "humbled himself" to allow men and women to participate in their divine life with the father and the Spirit (cf. Flp 2, 8; Mt 23, 12).

In the same way, subsidiarity, which encourages men and women to freely establish life-giving relationships with those who are closest and most directly dependent, and which requires the highest authorities to respect such relations, It manifests a "vertical" dimension aimed at the Creator of the social order (cf. Rm 12, 16, 18). A society that honors the principle of subsidiarity frees people from the feeling of despair and desperation, guaranteeing the freedom to engage reciprocally in the fields of trade, politics, and culture (cf. Quadragesimo anno, N. 80). When those responsible for the common good respect the natural human desire for self-government based on subsidiarity, they leave space for responsibility and individual initiation, but above all leave room for love (cf. Rm 13, 8; Deus caritas est, N. 28), which remains always "the best way of all" (1Co 12, 31)

In revealing the love of the Father, Jesus has taught us not only how to live as brothers and sisters here on Earth, but also that he himself is the way to perfect communion between us and with God in the future world, for it is through him that "we can present ourselves to the Father in a single Spirit" (cf. Ef 2, 18). As you work to develop ways that men and women can promote the common good as well as possible, I encourage you to probe the "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions of solidarity and subsidiarity. In this way, you will be able to propose more effective modalities to solve the many problems that afflict humanity at the threshold of the third millennium, testifying also the primacy of love, which transcends and performs justice as it orients humanity towards authentic life of God (Cfr. Message for World Day of Peace 2004).

With these feelings, I assure you my prayers and I extend my apostolic blessing to you and your loved ones as a pledge of peace and joy in the Risen Lord.