

Human Rights and the Common Good in Catholicism the Criteria of Their Theological Foundation

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Abstract

Theologians whose attention is devoted to social considerations know that the Christian picture of salvation carries with it an ethical commitment which goes well beyond the bounds of intimism. The heart of this picture is the idea of the Kingdom of God as the fulfilment of certain values (peace and justice) and recomposition of a humanity imbued with new brotherhood and communion. The increase of human relationships is an outstanding feature of today's world, whose development is itself fuelled by concomitant technical progress. Fraternal exchange of ideas between peoples is not achieved via such progress, but more deeply in the community of persons, and this demands reciprocal respect for their full spiritual dignity. The concept of the common good is elaborated and formulated in several ways in this article.

Keywords: Human Rights; Common Good; Catholic Point of View; Theological Foundation.

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1. The Christian Social Ethic as Vital Consciousness of The Meaning of Human Dignity

The unavoidable reference of Catholic social morality to the Magisterium of the Church does not stem from any claim to the presumed existence of political and religious connotations in its relationship with the community of mankind. What is involved, in truth, is a systematic reflection on the fundamental task of bearing witness to the faith professed within the compass of relational life.

Theologians whose attention is devoted to social considerations know that the Christian picture of salvation carries with it an ethical commitment which goes well beyond the bounds of intimism. The heart of this picture is the idea of the Kingdom of God as the fulfilment of certain values (peace and justice) and recomposition of a humanity imbued with new brotherhood and communion.

There is thus no deductive process, no definitive, confined and permanent model to be applied to all situations and all types of society and culture. Quite the opposite. An inductive method, one that reflects the vision of the Church and its relationships with the world and with history: the Church as the People of God «motivated by faith», «believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit» and hence «labours to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age» (Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et spes*, 11)

There remains, however, an intent that is both religious and moral: *religious* because the evangelizing and saving mission of the Church embraces man in the full truth of his existence and both his personal and his social and communal *esse*; *moral*, because the Church's objective is a humanism in the round, freedom from all that oppresses man and the development of man as a whole and all men. The paths to follow towards a society reconciled and harmonised in justice and integral love, a society that will be the historically forerunner, of «a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness» (2 Pet. 3:13) have already been traced out.

The increase of human relationships is an outstanding feature of today's world, whose development is itself fuelled by concomitant technical progress. Fraternal exchange of ideas between peoples is not achieved via such progress, but more deeply in the community of persons, and this demands reciprocal respect for their full spiritual dignity.

The Christian revelation is of great assistance in the promotion of this communion between persons, and directs the deeper

examination of legislation governing social life as prescribed by the Creator in man's spiritual and moral nature.

The dialectic between redemption and emancipation emerges in the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testament. Complete freedom from sin and deception also implies liberation from the oppressive structures and sinful alienations man has established in the world around him.

In His radical freedom, Jesus Christ preached liberation from sin. But He also addressed the power of the legalism, ritualism and authoritarianism that oppose the freedom of the Kingdom of God. His preaching was never solely centred on the peace of the soul.

These critical assertions denote the direction followed by a theological reflection on society whose focal point lies in understanding redemption as a possibility of human emancipation from injustice. Those who proclaim themselves Christians must stand both aside from every form of exploitation and oppression, and set out to seize every chance of working towards the construction of the sound authorities and the sound relationships needed for this purpose.

The "*doctrinal corpus*" the Church has formulated as the result of its social reflections springs from the blending of the evangelical message with the problems posed by social life.(COZZOLI, 1996: 9) Its purpose is to shed light on the action of Christians and all men of good will engaged in the quest for the common good.¹

This sets itself out as a "common good", as a principle that governs the ordering and structuring of society.

The concept of the common good is elaborate and can be formulated in several ways.²

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1. «[...] in accordance with a still valid scholastic terminology, the formal object of social teaching is not the individual or social problem, whether national or international, in itself and such technical solutions as there may be, but the light that can be shed on this problem by the Tradition of the Church and the Gospel message that inspires it. This object, of course, supposes an exact understanding founded on the strictest possible scientific analyses within the gnoseological limits of the social sciences. The social doctrine goes much further. It belongs, in effect, to another order insofar as the mission and duty of the Church do not lie so much in analysis of the social, economic and political situation *qua* the prelude to providing solutions on the same level of understanding and analysis, as in demonstrating, within the concrete circumstances, the necessities that stem from the Word of God, as transmitted by the Church, with regard to individual persons, their eternal destiny as images of the invisible God, called upon to live in a social setting with other men and women, with the rights and duties of one and all", See: Mejía, 1996: 38.
 2. The Austrian philosopher Johannes Messner, for example, asserts that «the common good is the reality proper to the Entirety of society, and both ontologically

If by common good we mean the sum of those conditions of the social life whereby men, families, associations and countries more adequately and readily may attain their own perfection, we are compelled to have it rank first among the goals of social life and of society as a whole.

It is a concept whose needs depend on the social conditions of the time and are closely linked with human rights.

The Second Vatican Council teaches us that it is the end pursued by the political community and defines it as the “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment.” (Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 26, 74) It is a question of material and spiritual perfection.

In harmony with the cultural sensitivities of our time, the contents of the common good can be identified with human rights¹: a society tends towards the common good to the extent of its respect for the rights of each person and each group.

First of all, the common good demands respect for the human person. It consists in the conditions for the exercise of the natural freedoms indispensable for the fulfilment of human vocation: such as the right to “activity in accord with the upright norm of one's own conscience, to protection of privacy and rightful freedom. Even in matters religious.” (Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 26)

In the second place, the common good calls for social well-being and development. Development is the summation of all the social duties.² It primarily consists in ensuring fulfilment of the needs of everyone.

Lastly, the common good implies peace, in other words, stability and the certainty of a just order. It thus supposes that honest means will be used by those in authority to guarantee the security of society and that of its members.

The common good of society is not an end in itself. Its worth lies in

and metaphysically ensures its members a fully human existence», See: MESSNER, 1967: 205. In the eyes of Jacques Maritain, the common good is not only to be identified with the material conditions of a society, but includes the spiritual goods, «it is not only a set of advantages and useful things, but rectitude of life, an end good in itself; that which the ancients called *bonum honestum*, an honest good», Se: Maritain, 1995: 32. In his opinion, the common good has a theological dimension beyond its material contents.

1. See: Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1907.

2. See: Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1907.

attainment of the ultimate end of the person. This ultimate end is transcendent and complements the historical dimension, which would otherwise be reduced to simple social and economic well-being devoid of its true *raison d'être*.¹

It is in this sense that every social order blends into the moral order.

2. Social Development and Human Rights

The aim of the ethical model elaborated by the Christian tradition is to promote the entire truth on man, starting from the assumption that man is to be understood as a person: the human person as a transcendent, intangible founding and governing value of every proposal for social development.

This vision of man is by no means a bar to progress and development. It stimulates the search for appropriate ways in which they can be achieved and provides the criteria for their humanisation. Since, in fact, persons constitute the essential value fixed at the centre of every interest, that which benefits them is good, evil is that which degrades or exploits them, or destroys their existence.

An initial consequence of the non-exploitability of the human person is the existence of a certain number of innate and inalienable rights which no one can annul insofar as they antedate any and every form of historical institution.

The expression "human rights" has always asserted its positive indication of all the fundamental personal rights and freedoms, the essential needs that must be satisfied to secure the dignified attainment of a person's full complement of material and spiritual attributes. The law recognises these needs as fundamental rights and demands their due observance on the part of both their holders and public institutions.²

These rights have often been made the subject of solemn and sweeping declarations over the course of the centuries. They were adumbrated for the first time in the American Declaration of Independence signed at Philadelphia on 4 July 1776. This was followed during the French Revolution by the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* in 1789 and again in 1793.

The dignity of the person is the *fons et origo* of human rights.³

On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations

1. See: John Paul II, 1991: 41.

2. See: Papisca, 1993: 189-199; on the ethical-cultural directives, See: Cassese, 1988.

3. A good foundational survey is provided in Buonuomo, 1997.

proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the common ideal to be striven for by all peoples and all nations in order that teaching and education might be everywhere directed to securing observance of such rights and freedoms, and ensuring, through progressive national and international measures, their universal and effective acknowledgement and respect among the peoples of the Member States and those of the territories over which they rule.

This betokens a gradual awareness of both the primacy of the human person with respect to all of mankind's particular social creations, and the innate character of man's fundamental rights that stems from his very nature and dignity.

The Church received, approved and re-elaborated the contents of this declaration in Pope John XXIII's Encyclical *Pacem in terris*, wherein mention is primarily made of the right to existence and physical integrity, and to the means indispensable and sufficient for a decorous tenor of life (No.49). A distinction is drawn between "rights to freedom" (or "political rights"), which impose limits on the powers of the State and require it to respect fundamental personal freedoms, and "social" or "economic rights" that require the State and its individual citizens to undertake particular measures on behalf of disadvantaged members so that all can partake of certain essential economic and social goods.

Since duties are the obvious counterparts of these rights, their assertion is also evidence of the ethical nature of social life.

The inevitably generic nature of these principles means that they cannot be made the direct source of an ideal framework of social development. The rights attributed to individual persons often travel side by side. The right to a fair share of earthly goods, for example, is in no wise accompanied by a yardstick for the precise determination of each person's share. The right to a decorous existence does not, nor indeed could it, define the exact compass of this "decorousness". They are principles which open a path that must be followed according to ethical tenets supported by a vigilant sense of fairness. Their interpretation will always be conditioned and determined by the twists and turns of history.¹

1. The Second Vatican Council particularly stressed the need to ensure room for freedom in matters of culture (*Gaudium et spes*, 56). In a culture with a human dimension, there should be no doubts concerning the right of everyone to be both a receiver and a promoter. The Council was very clear on this point. It both sketched out a programme for promoting awareness of these rights and proposed a plan whereby, at both the national and international level, in all fields, from politics to

The current discussion comprises three sections: the foundations of such rights, i.e. the type of reasoning on which they rest, the interpretation of already established rights, and the proclamation of new rights.

Irrespective of the differences of opinion in these three fields, it must be understood that every declaration of human rights is a defence of rights antecedent to positive law and is thus the assertion of an earlier foundation. This means that one must continually explain the reasons for the defence of foundations that antedate agreement on human rights, or the reasons why human rights exist as such even in the absence of complete agreement among the lawmakers.

3. The Question of The Foundations of Human Rights

It has been rightly pointed out that “it is an illusion to think that the question of their foundation can be overlooked when rights are enforced. One can, of course, place the date of their proclamation between parentheses. When they are to be applied concretely to particular cases, however, the conceptions that lie behind them come to the surface and examination of their foundations becomes unavoidable.” (Viola, 2000: 189)

The cultural and philosophical framework abounds with theories of the foundation of human rights. The *sceptical theory* denies the existence of an absolute foundation, since this would clash with the historical and relative nature of the rights themselves and lead to an abstract proclamation as opposed to enforcement. The *intuitionist theory* maintains that inalienable rights are self-evident. The *ontological theory* asserts that men have rights because rationality and freedom are part of their nature and such rights may be seen as the outward expression of the dignity of the human person (the *theological* version of this theory claims that human beings have rights because they are creatures and children of God). The *institutionalist theory* sees the foundation of rights in a practical accord based on institutional rules or simply on practical reasons (legalism and juridical positivism). The *theory of interests* is not confined to assertion of the entitlement to rights but it brings out their interests and the needs to be met. The *utilitarian theory* holds that rights are not respected as such, but insofar as they are the

economics, fundamental decisions are to be taken to ensure that everyone has the right to participate in human culture. It also deplored the fact that so many people are deprived of the possibility of embarking upon responsible initiatives and are thus rendered unable to make a real contribution to the common good (*Gaudium et spes*, 60).

source of benefits.¹

The foundational path followed in the genesis of human rights has been marked out theologically not so much in gnoseological terms (if and how it is possible to apply a cognitive approach to such rights), as in ontological terms (there are rights because there are human beings).

Furthermore the identification of certain foundations meets both the criterion of need/possibility and the criterion of desirability.²

If a right is owned ontologically, it cannot be diminished by any form of historical non-application, nor by its non-recognition in the particular circumstances of a social, juridical or cultural context. A foundation of this kind rests on a necessary awareness of the reasons that justify such rights as a means, *inter alia*, of rescuing them from the fragility and provisional nature of agreements and emotions. An agreement, in fact, springs from the convergence of practical needs and is patently insufficient on its own as an explanation of the existence of human rights.³

The natural-ontological model frees the issue of human rights foundation from historical and cultural fluctuations which unavoidably lead to a conception of man whereby he is historically fragmented and not considered as a whole. However, practical agreement is a good starting point for considering not the foundation but the acknowledgement and safeguard of human rights as a reasonable shared notion on which it is possible to build human relationships in social life.

The issue of safeguard of human rights follows but does not overlap that of their foundation. Insofar as human rights are universal and

1. See: Viola, 2000: 199-204. For a point-by-point investigation of the question of the foundation of human rights and the philosophical theories involved, See: Vinciguerra, 2003: 103-122.

2. This opinion is that of Norberto Bobbio. After defining the issue, however, he adopts a pessimistic approach denying any final and absolute foundation, since it is not possible to found that which cannot be defined. «The first difficulty stems from the consideration that the expression “human rights” is very vague expression.[...]. Most definitions are tautologies. Rights of man are those that belong, or should belong, to all men, or of which no man may be deprived. Lastly, when any reference is made to their contents, one cannot avoid the introduction of terms of value: “Rights of man are those whose recognition is a necessary condition for perfection of the human person or for the development of civilisation”. See: Bobbio, 1997: 8.

3. The question concerning the foundation of rights is raised because «legislative texts and international treaties are not sufficient. A practical agreement is more of a problem than a solution because individuals and States can agree. Must they first agree and actually agree on the existence of rights that lie outside the free range of action of the political power?, See: Viola, 2000: 192.

inalienable they precede their legal aspect which safeguards and sanctions them without however establishing them.

The ontological theory stresses awareness of the creatural nature of the human person as the “image of God”. God created man in His own “image and likeness.” (Gen. 1: 26, 27) Man is thus the culmination of creation insofar as he is not only structurally dependent on God, but also participates in His lordship over what has been created. For Christians, man's greatest value lies in his identity with the substance of God (*imago Dei*).¹ Paul's reflections in the New Testament deepen and develop this reference in his theology of the “temple of the Spirit” (cf. Rom. 8: 16-26), which assigns the person an intangible value in the sphere of the sacred.

The light of the Biblical revelation points out the coordinates of “human dignity”, focuses on its genesis and explains its contents.

What is to be asserted, in fact, is that fundamental human rights are preceded by something original and more fundamental that explains their intangibility and inviolability. A similar requirement is primarily to be found in religious thinking, since a metaphysical and religious conception is imposed as a necessary prerequisite.²

4. The Social Magisterium and Human Rights

Attainment of the common good is the purpose of politically organised society. As Pope John XXIII declared in his Encyclical *Pacem in terris*, «we must pay attention to the fact that the common good appertains to man as a whole: to both his bodily and his spiritual needs»; and thus «the essential indication for implementation of the common good lies in personal rights and duties» (No. 55).

“Common good” and “human rights” cannot be specifically identified. Even so, their intimate convergence is evident in that observance and promotion of human rights are “a necessary condition and sure guarantee of the development of “man as a whole and all men”.” (SRS 44) When a society fails to respect human rights, its ability to decide according to the common good disappears (see

1. “All human beings, in as much as they are created in the image of God, have the dignity of a person. A person is not something but someone, capable of self-knowledge and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with God and with other persons. He is summoned, through grace, to an alliance with his Creator, to give Him an answer founded on faith and love that no one else can offer in his place” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 357).

2. “The problem lies [...] in the justification of a metaphysical conception of the person, since if we wish to continue to use this concept and that of its dignity, we must resign ourselves to having to deal with metaphysics”, See: Viola, 2000: 213.

CA47).

As has been several times asserted, the root of the rights of every person is to be sought in common human dignity.

Inalienable human rights must first be understood ontologically prior to their acquisition of a juridical connotation. Their immediate source is the *esse* and dignity of the person, while in the ultimate analysis they stem from God, from whom man derives his nature. Insofar as they are the gifts of God they can in no way be regarded as conferred by some public authority, which is not required to recognise them as its gratuitous concessions, but to respect and defend them as precedents in furtherance of its strict duty to render justice.

According to the social Magisterium, human rights are: *originated by God*, that is to say they can be used for the common good and the Supreme Good (the fulfilment of man); *universal*, insofar as the dignity of all men is essentially the same; *inalienable*, because «no man may with impunity outrage that human dignity» (LEO XIII, Encyclical *Rerum novarum*, 11) *symmetrical*, since that which one claims for oneself cannot be denied to anyone else in the same situation; *anterior to the State*, insofar as the State (an authority in general) neither creates nor grants them, but must recognise, safeguard and promote them; *congruent with the common good*, in that this avoids their individualistic reductionism and brings them within the compass of an appropriate context of solidarity.

Several documents in the social Magisterium have set out to list these rights. The most complete enumeration is to be found in the Encyclical *Pacem in terris* (Nos 4-11), which recognises and acquires the importance of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948¹. It declares «Every one has the right to life, liberty and security of person, and to the means indispensable and sufficient for a decorous tenor of life» (No. 4); «has the right to respect for his person, good reputation, to freedom in his search for the truth and in the manifestation of his thought, within the limits allowed by the moral order and the common good» (No. 5); «the right to basic education and to technical and vocational training appropriate to the degree of development of his own political community; and likewise the right to the public and private worship of God» (No. 6); «the right to freedom

1. The Church initially found it difficult to recognise the universal rights of man because they were proclaimed in the 18th and 19th centuries in close conjunction with an enlightened approach that was distinctly anticlerical. The situation eventually changed to the point where the Church became a true champion of human rights. Its attention, in fact, has been constantly directed to the subject since the pontificate of John XXIII.

in the choice of his status and to create a family with equal rights and duties on the part of men and women, and also to heed the call to priesthood or the religious life» (No. 7); «the right to private ownership of goods, including those used in production» (No. 8); «the right to meet with others and form associations» (No. 9); «the right to freedom of movement and residence within the political community of which he is a citizen» (No. 10); «the right to take an active part in public life and bring a personal contribution to the implementation of the common good and the right to public security, and hence to concrete sphere of rights protected against every form of arbitrary attack.» (No. 11)

It can undoubtedly be asserted that *Pacem in terris* is the most complete magisterial treatment of the question of human rights. Its central feature is the statement that every human being is a person and the subject of both rights and duties. As to the foundation of these rights, the text declares that «in a well-ordered and fecund community there must be established as a foundation the principle that every human being is a person, that is to say a nature endowed with intelligence and free will, and therefore the subject of both rights and duties that spring immediately and simultaneously from his very nature: rights and duties that are thus universal, inviolable, inalienable.» (No. 5) Stress is in this way laid on the existence of an order, ordained by God and impressed in the consciousness of every man, of which the progressive expression and enforcement is mandatory and constitutes the matrix of such duties. This order is founded on the very nature of man and every man can and must accede thereto insofar as he is capable of intelligence and willingness, of rights and duties that are absolutely inviolable.

The Pope's thought then proceeds to another foundation and brings in a reference to the theological level: «So that if one then considers the dignity of the human person in the light of the divine revelation, it will be seen to be incomparably greater, because men have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and through grace have become the children and friends of God and been named as heirs to eternal glory.» (No. 5)

The magisterium of Pope John XXIII is concentrated in the two Encyclicals *Mater et magistra* and *Pacem in terris*. Many, too, have been the teachings of other Roman Popes, especially since 1950. The numerous broadcast messages and speeches of Pius XII in particular emphasised the great principles of the inviolability and intangibility of the person and provided practical guidance for the political and socio-economic order in a period sadly burdened with the devastation caused by the war and the problems of post-war

reconstruction.

The conspicuous attention directed by Pope Paul VI to social and economic matters is primarily illustrated in the *Populorum progressio* Encyclical and the *Octogesima adveniens* apostolic letter. *Populorum progressio* is essentially concerned with the global extent of the social issue and sets out the Christian view that development cannot be confined to economic growth, whereas in *Octogesima adveniens* the pope exhorted the Christian community to also act in a politically significant manner.

The Second Vatican Council was of paramount importance. The Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et spes*, deals extensively with the great subject of the dignity of the human person as a parameter through which a true understanding of the community of mankind, human activities and the Church's mission in the world can be attained.

Pope John Paul II's social Magisterium is the source of a fresh doctrinal drive. In his first social Encyclical, *Laborem exercens*, he already reasserted man's dignity as the underlying criterion of all his works. In the Pope's own words: «The Church considers it her task always to call attention to the dignity and rights of those who work, to condemn situations in which that dignity and those rights are violated, and to help to guide the above-mentioned changes so as to ensure authentic progress by man and society.» (No. 1)

The Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* draws the attention of the faithful to solidarity as the bedrock of social development. The Encyclicals *Centesimus annus*, *Veritatis splendor* and *Evangelium vitae*, too, can be regarded as a further great and valuable contribution to the defence and promotion of human rights from the viewpoint of the Catholic Church. They speak out against the dangers of a relativist democratic society and propose unrelinquishable truths for the moral edification of the social community.¹

5. Human Rights and Moral Responsibility

Consideration of human rights and their theological and magisterial formulation serves to underscore the need for a double loyalty (to

1. The Pope states that: "[...] today we are witnessing a predominance, not without signs of opposition, of the democratic ideal, together with lively attention to and concern for human rights. But for this very reason it is necessary for peoples in the process of reforming their systems to give democracy an authentic and solid foundation through the explicit recognition of those 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" John Paul II, 1991: 47.

God's salvific plan and to human dignity), whose outward expression is moral responsibility.

The theological *summa* enables us to view human dignity as a grand, divine gift to be garnered, recognised, protected and safeguarded, since it affords the means whereby man proceeds towards his fulfilment. The question of human rights cannot be detached from the idea of fullness of meaning.

The terms in which this responsibility is rendered effective relate to the features that constitute the complexity of reality, their simultaneousness and interaction in a reciprocity that is not always linear, but often dialectical and conflicting: features that are equivalent to those aspects which contribute towards the marking out of the characters of human development, whose amplitude and extent correspond to the reality wherein the "human" being is accomplished.

A front is thus opened for basic, radical questions.

In the first place, questions of an *anthropological nature*: is it possible to identify a "univocal" model of man, or at least some lines of interpretation on which an agreement can be reached concerning the "philosophy" of being and living even by those who set off from different points?

Then there are questions of an *epistemological nature*: can "knowledge" be detached from considerations concerning the nature of man, from the circumstances of the search itself and its underlying human finalism, and hence confine itself to reading and interpreting the phenomenological sphere?

Last but not least, there are questions of an *ethical and cultural nature*: are there values on which it is possible to achieve a consensus in a pluralistic society? It must be borne in mind that the spiritual and cultural heritage of peoples is the result of a many-centuried "sedimentation" of concepts, values and norms whose concrete form is that of cultural "systems" in which the dynamics of conservation and communication wield enormous power: can rules and standards be identified by simply referring to "tradition" or "consent"?

These questions must be addressed in the light of four anthropological and ethical principles.¹

1. These are principles whose permanence and universal significance constitute the initial and fundamental parameter with which social phenomena must be interpreted and assessed. Their starting point is the principle of the dignity of the

A *principle of loyalty* towards the coordinates of human dignity whereby a scale of reference values is devised as the prelude to the determination of priorities: the maximum (and hence the unexchangeable) value is human dignity itself.

A *principle of responsibility*,¹ which enjoins (in the form of a categorical imperative) men to safeguard the conditions that make their life “human”, and ensure both the survival and the specific quality of such conditions through the observance and promotion of all rights.

A *principle of solidarity*,² whereby men are not treated on equal terms on account of what they “have”, but what they “are”, that is to say the dignity common to each and every person in all of life's stages and conditions. This personal dignity is the identity of man *qua* man, an identity constitutively open to relationships “with” and “on behalf of” others. Solidarity is the necessary passage from man as the subject of rights to humanity as the subject of rights: peace, health, development, well-being, rights that spring from a solidarity among human beings that demands the observance of some fixed concepts, such as the non-exclusive appropriation of resources, and the enjoyment of all advantages (right of access to common property).

The *principle of the common good*, now assessed with planetary parameters owing to the growth of a sense of interdependence. This common good represents the order of a community, the benchmark criterion through which each of its members can lead a significant and qualitatively decorous life.³

The touchstone of moral responsibility is at all times the human person and his integral individual and collective development. What is involved is everything associated with his rights, his aspirations,

human person, while their individual facets furnish the criteria for consideration of the ethical aspects of communal and participative life, See: *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, Nos 29-42, 1988, 35-43.

1. See PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 46; *Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica*, 1913-1917.

2. This term is widely employed in the Magisterium. It expresses the need to recognise within the set of bonds by which both men and social groups are held together the space wherein human freedom can move to work for communal growth. “This then is 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.” SEE: PAUL II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, No. 38).

3. The common good answers to man's highest inclinations since its attainment is arduous and requires ability and the seeking of the good of others as though it were one's own (see: THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2).

his dignity, his freedom and his responsibility. It is a moral commitment that instils dynamism into the planning of society and, by moulding it in accordance with the needs that stem from personal and communal living, projects it towards the horizons of human finalism.¹

1. On these aspects, See: Kerber, 2002: 195-206.

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