

TO BRING TOGETHER THE VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF THE COMMON GOOD, THE PROMOTION OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH AND THE PASTORAL CARE OF INDIVIDUALS

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Introduction

Before we consider how we can bring together the various dimensions of the common good, we must justify its existence in a culture that claims that it is an archaic relic now outmoded. The decline of this cornerstone of classical political philosophy was certainly influenced by the deconstruction of philosophy itself, due to the current adoption of methods of empirical science as the only way to acquire valid knowledge.¹

The common good is a concept that can be grasped. If there is an intellect that can speculate and if practical reasoning is used, they can derive, albeit imperfectly, the objective *truth* of the *human good*. The common good and the truth of the human good go hand in hand. When the latter is no longer evident, the common good loses its meaning and becomes incomprehensible. The unattainability of the true human good, good in itself, declares the end of the very concept of the common good and the subsequent crisis in politics and democracy.

We are certain that this crisis can be overcome if the concept of the common good is recovered. After all, politics and democracy are structured as activities undertaken by citizens, and they, by the force of their characteristic goodness that unfolds in social friendship and collaboration, are called together to achieve the common good. This is not the simple sum of individual interests. It requires that their assessment and agreement be carried out on the basis of a balanced hierarchy of real-

¹ On the subject of the common good, see: AA.VV., *Alla ricerca del bene comune. Prospettive e implicazioni pedagogiche per una nuova solidarietà*, ed. G. QUINZI, U. MONTISCI, M. TOSO, LAS, Rome 2008.

values and, ultimately, on a correct understanding of the dignity and rights of each person.²

1. *What is the common good?*

Before we talk about how to bring together the multiple dimensions of the common good, it is helpful to define it. In this regard, we are aided by the Social Doctrine or Teaching of the Church (= SDC or STC), which gives us the definition that is in *Gaudium et Spes*.³ According to this great pastoral constitution of the Second Vatican Council, “the common good embraces the sum of those conditions of the social life whereby human beings, families and associations more adequately and readily may attain their own perfection” (GS no. 74).

In other words, the common good of political society is given by a set of ethical, legal, economic, financial, institutional, political, cultural and religious conditions which allow citizens and the various groups to achieve human fulfillment. We can therefore say that the common good is a good that is intrinsically correlative to human beings and to the human good in its entirety. The human good is composed of other goods that are not considered by chance, but that are sorted on the basis of a hierarchy, and the touchstone for this hierarchy is the Good and the True, that is, God. Therefore, the social conditions that constitute the common good must be achieved in such a way as to foster integrated and sustainable development for everyone *in God*.⁴

At first glance, the definition of the common good that we are given by GS may appear to come from a purely *formal* perspective. It is indeed considered to be an *external* good that concerns social relations and institutions and their organisation and arrangement for the benefit of the human growth of all citizens and social groups. Nevertheless, if we think

² Cf JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus annus*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1991, no. 47.

³ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, in AAS 58 (1966)1025-1115 (=GS).

⁴ Underpinning the human good is the awareness that God is considered to be the ultimate good and end. The union of heart and mind with God is the criterion for the true ordering of aims. From this point of view, God is the primary author, although not the only one, of the moral order. God is our help in behaving according to this order. God is the judge and rewarder of life, whether virtuous or sinful.

about the common good as being something *processual* or as a *set of practices* that constantly minister to the progressive humanisation of citizens and groups, we run into a second and more classical definition. It is, let us say, 'substantial' and now quite forgotten, and it dates back to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. It was endorsed by personalist philosophers such as the French philosopher Jacques Maritain.⁵ It is the common good understood as the *upright life* of the multitude, the whole *people*, citizens and representatives. This conclusion is inevitable, because the formal and liberal definition of the common good requires that life in the community be virtuous. In fact, the common good takes effect as a social environment that facilitates the human fulfillment of the members of the *polis* if they practise good community life, that is, if they constantly direct all circumstances to the service of the integrated and sustainable development of all.

The common good, as an external good or a formal good, presupposes the *upright life* of the people, and the *right conduct* of citizens and their representatives. This is possible, however, when there is close *communion with God*, deep *spirituality* and constant *development* and moral *conversion*.

Here we have a first coming together of the dimensions of the common good. This must not be neglected by those who accompany the politicians in their personal and common journey. The intimate and inseparable connection between the *formal and substantive* dimensions of the common good, the good of a whole people, should help policy makers in the following:

- 1) To see that their commitment to the common good is always in need of *unceasing animation* that is moral and spiritual as well as cultural;
- 2) To avoid seeing *personal ethics* as being separate from *public ethics*, contrary to contemporary neo-contractual and neo-utilitarian approaches that say that political ethics is structured as “ethics of the third person”. It aims to create a social structure where citizens, as

⁵ Cf J. MARITAIN, *La persona e il bene comune*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2009.

- people with aspirations and as independent individuals, can do whatever they want as long as they do not cause harm to others, or, if they do so, it is only in view of a better result. In essence, this kind of ethic produces utilitarian citizens and representatives. With that, however, there remains an open question on how they, being led by fundamentally selfish goals, can devote themselves to the common good in a disinterested manner and care for the welfare of others;
- 3) To be mindful that although citizens can become better through the ‘right’ structures and institutions, it is still essential to continue the work of educating consciences and of redemption. Correct systems should always be sought, but the moral energy needed may not be given by the state and is not to be found among its assets. From this point of view, a precondition is the religious freedom of individuals and communities. Only relationship and conversation with God can really foster the moral welfare of the citizens. This means that there is an urgent need to build up *positive* state secularity;⁶
 - 4) To cultivate the *community* and *inclusive* dimension of the common good. All citizens are *capable of the common good* and they should participate by emphasising that which unites them rather than that which divides them. Without the cooperation of everyone, without *active citizenship* on the part of all, the good of the *polis* is depleted and those who suffer are the people who are playing their part with sacrifice and generosity. We cannot be satisfied with good that is done individually. The field of action must be extended and everyone

⁶ The secular state by law, given the primacy of the individual and civil society, cannot be considered to be a source of truth and morality on the basis of a doctrine or ideology. It receives it from outside, from a pluralist and harmonically convergent civil society, the essential measure of knowledge and truth about the good of humankind and of the groups. It does not receive it from pure rational knowledge, to care for and protect with a philosophy that is completely independent from the historical context, as there is no pure rational evidence that is divorced from history. Metaphysical and moral reason acts only in a historical context and depends on it, but at the same time transcends it. In short, the state draws its support from pre-existing cultural and religious traditions and not from bare reason. It receives it from reason that matures through practices and institutions favourable to it, in the historical form of the religious beliefs that keep alive the ethical sense of existence and its transcendence. On the subject of the secular state, see: M. TOSO, *Democrazia e libertà. Laicità oltre il neoilluminismo postmoderno*, LAS, Roma 2006, especially pp. 179-244.

must be convinced and become involved in working towards its realisation. The common good requires the *inclusion* of every person, whether as beneficiaries or as providers. It is precisely for this reason that it is not acceptable to give it a utilitarian interpretation, as summarised by the formula: “The greatest good for the greatest number”. This interpretation implies the exclusion of part of the population, since it covers only the majority and not the whole. The common good, properly understood, invites us to overcome the barriers, isolation, parochialism, localism, regionalism and the marginalisation of the weakest. It means that we want the good to be for everyone, through the contribution of everyone. This is the reason why the pursuit of the common good must not be separated from the commitment to emancipate those who are last. It is by relying on the desire for the good of the other, on the basis of common fellowship and civic friendship, that we overcome disregard of the poor and the fear of difference, xenophobia that Catholic morality considers unacceptable. The common good is accompanied by substantial or “high-intensity” democracy, as scholars are wont to say of contemporary politics. It is in contrast with state approaches that are paternalistic and tend towards excessive welfare. It requires that social justice be carried out as the form of justice that is intrinsic to it;

- 5) To avoid identifying the common good with the infrastructure of a country, and even with the shared values and the collective assets, such as the protected environment, access to safe drinking water for all and the land preserved and cultivated. It does not consist of the sum of individual goods and must not be reduced either to a particular modern set of social conditions, such as a new form of welfare, that is, corporate welfare which is less centralised than in the past; reformed institutions or procedural rules; a type of integrated care between the state, market and civil society; more rational and sophisticated achievements from the point of view of scientific progress; the repeal of unjust laws. The common good is not only

research and the implementation of media and institutions that are increasingly more appropriate and consistent with the objectives of humanisation which is inherent to it. Although, in view of a more participatory democracy and not only representative, for example, it is certainly important that the electoral laws allow for the increased expression of civil society that will allow for better communication with its representatives.

Of course, the common good includes all of this, that is, the necessary and methodical search for means and institutions, for new structures in the relations between state, civil society and marketplace, for active labour market policies, for policies that support families and consider each as an integral nucleus, and for policies on quality and sustainable development for all. The alternative is to stay at the level of concepts and nice theories, a political good that remains abstract. In all of this, the action of individuals and peoples must be supported and animated by ongoing commitment. It must be done in the light of a comprehensive picture of the human good, in solidarity and universal fellowship, and with positive interpersonal relationships that involve freedom, responsibility, subsidiarity and attitudes of cooperation and service towards others. In other words, the common good does not consist of evanescent upright living. It is a life that is good, concrete and authentic, upheld and substantiated by the launch of new institutions and regulations. It has just laws and free, stable and transparent markets that serve the real economy. It has a welfare system that is redesigned to be closer to the people.⁷ There are many other things that respond to a map that changes constantly according to the context of the moment, so that social life is oriented to human fulfillment of all citizens in God. A good life lived by the multitudes is accomplished through unanimous participation, regardless of the faith they profess, with a commitment to mutual co-being and pro-being, in terms of freedom and responsibility, of giving and sharing, and without imposing anyone's personal perception of the good. It involves

⁷ On this subject, see: M. TOSO, *Welfare Society. La riforma del Welfare: l'apporto dei pontefici*, LAS, Roma 2003².

giving witness through one's life, coming into contact with others and being familiar with public discourse, the observance of democratic rules and just laws, and the possibility of conscientious objection when the laws are gravely offensive to the existence and dignity of people.⁸ The common good unifies and connects dimensions of being that are free decisions and practical action. While it is simultaneously a depiction of the social conditions and of the actions of citizens and their representatives, especially in relation to the truth of the human good – the common good and anthropological issues are in fact intimately interdependent –, this good presents itself and is gradually revealed to the awareness of the people, under certain historical conditions.

2. The reason for connecting the dimensions of the common good right from the national to the global level

There is a close connection between the 'internal' and the 'external' dimensions of the common good. This is because it relates to the human person who is both a bodily and spiritual being, is inherently social and caring, and who is fulfilled in communion and in collaboration with others. Human beings are structurally open to the Transcendent and are equipped with a permanent and historical identity.

If we bear in mind the primary element of the common good which is the person as a whole and, more specifically, in their dignity or capacity for truth, goodness and God, then it is possible to understand how the multiple dimensions of the common good are interdependent and all are aimed at human fulfillment in God.⁹

⁸ The common good of the *polis* is not the ultimate aim of human beings. It is an intermediate aim. An upright social order (*finis qui*) is not an end in itself. It is proposed and achieved as an indispensable condition for the attainment of perfection of the members who are corporal-spiritual beings (*finis cui*), that have a transcendent purpose. People do not resolve everything in political society (cf THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 21, a.4, ad tertium).

⁹ The modern concept of human dignity that is based on absolute autonomy where a person alone or in a group is the only foundation of the law, and on a notion of rights with unlimited and indiscriminate claims and on radical freedom, could never be accepted by those who are inspired by the SDC. In Christian culture, human beings are not unconditionally independent. They are independent and at the same time dependent or theonomous. Their practical reasoning uses eternal law and they do not create values and moral norms (cf.

It is because of the anthropological foundation of the common good that it is possible to explain the ethical, caring and subsidiary nature of societies, peoples and states considered as a set of structures and institutions, and of the global community. Despite their differences, the peoples are constituted as the ‘we’ who do not have an arbitrary or merely consensual origin. Political societies, states and the community of peoples arise as a reality created by freedom and responsibility, will and reason, under the irresistible impulse of beings that are ontologically and morally relational: “*Civitas est a natura inclinante et ratione perficiente*”.¹⁰

Since the common good is something that is ultimately postulated by people that reach out in solidarity for their human fulfillment, given their simultaneous poverty and richness of being, it is clear that the first people to be fulfilled are the citizens themselves, both as individuals and as groups. In order to implement this, they make use of political society and the state, which therefore does not have an exclusive duty and responsibility, but must coordinate and integrate the actions of citizens. It is in and through political society and the state that the capacity for the common good of people and groups are somehow increased, based on the ontological, practical and purposeful pre-eminence of people with respect to their being part of society.

The relationship between individual citizens, groups of people, political society, states and the world community of nations can therefore only be structured in terms of subsidiarity. It is a principle that comes from people’s very essence and from the societies in which they are called to

JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1993, nos. 35-53). Although it is wounded and fallible, it is capable of truth and good. It is *capax Dei*, with the help of revelation and faith. Rights are a consequence of duties (I have rights to fulfill duties towards myself, God and others). Freedom is part of human nature. It is human freedom (cf. no. 86). If it is without rules and separate from the truth, it will become absolute license, irrational choice. The freedom of citizens has an inescapable dimension of transcendence. As stated by Thomas Aquinas, “man is not subordinate to the political community (*non ordinatur ad communitatem politicam*) on the basis of all that he is and on the totality of his abilities; therefore not every action is meritorious or demeritorious in relation to the political community. Rather, all that man is and everything that man has as capacity and resource is to be focused on God (*ordinandum est ad Deum*)”.

¹⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Polit.*, VII, lect. 4.

live. Human beings exist as unique individuals that are free, rational and relational individuals. They bring about various societies of differing sizes, not to become absorbed and dissolved in them, but to achieve purposes that it would be unlikely for them to achieve alone. If they simultaneously create and maintain multiple societies, it is because reason and experience convinces them that certain goals are best accessed from some rather than from others. According to the principle of subsidiarity, all societies must allow individual citizens and groups to move on their own initiative and their accountability in achieving the ends that they are able to pursue and implement. Larger societies should not hinder smaller companies in this specific action. They must, however, provide the necessary support. The state, for example, cannot claim to be the sole educator of their children, because education is first and foremost the task of parents and families. Rather, it should ensure that they are able to properly carry out their educational duties.

If we consider that subsidiarity is the basis for achieving the common good on several levels that do not cancel out but are within ever wider circles of solidarity, it is natural to extend our gaze to see how they can be connected right out to the global dimension. Already in the last century, the dimension of implementation on the national level was seen to be insufficient and it was realised that the social question had become a global concern. John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*, which was promulgated fifty years ago, clearly expresses this awareness in these terms: "Today the universal common good presents us with problems which are world-wide in their dimensions; problems, therefore, which cannot be solved except by a public authority with power, organisation and means co-extensive with these problems, and with a world-wide sphere of activity. Consequently the moral order itself demands the establishment of some such general form of public authority. But this general authority equipped with world-

wide power and adequate means for achieving the universal common good cannot be imposed by force”.¹¹

It is not possible to pause here to consider the main types of constitution of the public authorities of the world that are mentioned in Pope John’s encyclical, nor to illustrate their moral and democratic characteristics.¹² Suffice it to say that Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate*, has continued to repeat the question. He believes that the current conditions for the realisation of the global common good demand, with greater urgency, that we proceed in this direction and, in particular, that we move towards the reform both of the organisation of the United Nations and of the global economic and financial architecture.¹³

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace moved along the same lines with its reflections entitled “Toward Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority”,¹⁴ in

¹¹ JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, nos. 137-138.

¹² On this topic, see: M. TOSO, *La ricezione e l’attualità della «Pacem in terris»*, in PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Il concetto di pace. Attualità della «Pacem in terris» nel 50° anniversario (1963-2013)*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2013, pp. 41-70. See also, in the same volume, contributions by Vincenzo Buonomo, Vittorio Possenti, Ignazio Musu.

¹³ It seems appropriate to repeat here the exact words of Pope Benedict XVI: “In the face of the unrelenting growth of global interdependence, there is a strongly felt need, even in the midst of a global recession, for a reform of the United Nations Organization, and likewise of economic institutions and international finance, so that the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth. One also senses the urgent need to find innovative ways of implementing the principle of responsibility to protect and of giving poorer nations an effective voice in shared decision-making. This seems necessary in order to arrive at a political, juridical and economic order which can increase and give direction to international cooperation for the development of all peoples in solidarity. To manage the global economy; to revive economies hit by the crisis; to avoid any deterioration of the present crisis and the greater imbalances that would result; to bring about integral and timely disarmament, food security and peace; to guarantee the protection of the environment and to regulate migration: for all this, there is urgent need of a true world political authority, as my predecessor Blessed John XXIII indicated some years ago. Such an authority would need to be regulated by law, to observe consistently the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, to seek to establish the common good, and to make a commitment to securing authentic integral human development inspired by the values of charity in truth. Furthermore, such an authority would need to be universally recognized and to be vested with effective power to ensure security for all, regard for justice, and respect for rights. Obviously it would have to have the authority to ensure compliance with its decisions from all parties, and also with the coordinated measures adopted in various international forums. Without this, despite the great progress accomplished in various sectors, international law would risk being conditioned by the balance of power among the strongest nations. The integral development of peoples and international cooperation require the establishment of a greater degree of international ordering, marked by subsidiarity, for the management of globalization. They also require the construction of a social order that at last conforms to the moral order, to the interconnection between moral and social spheres, and to the link between politics and the economic and civil spheres, as envisaged by the Charter of the United Nations.” (BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2009, no. 67).

¹⁴ Cf PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Toward Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2011. For a study of the

which, in the final analysis, the proposal is not only reform through small gradual steps by the existing international institutions, but also the creation of new ones, such as ‘regional’ central banks and the corresponding political communities (United States of Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia).

As Benedict XVI said on 3 December 2012 when he was addressing the participants of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, it is not the duty of the Church to suggest, in legal and political terms, the practical configuration of such an international system, “but to offer to those who are responsible for it those principles for reflection, criteria for judgment and practical guidelines that can guarantee the anthropological and ethical framework around the common good”.

From what has been said so far, with respect to purely sociological and nationalistic conceptions of the common good, those who have the task of accompanying politicians are called to the following:

- a) To recognise the fruitfulness of the notion of the common good as an expression of human dignity and understood as the capacity for truth, for good and for God. In a globalised society that is also fragmented and 'liquid', it seems that every citizen has a personal conception of good that is therefore incommensurable with that of others. It seems impossible to bring together on a shared platform the capacity for the common good which every person possesses regardless of ethnicity, culture and religion. It is a guarantee of deep communion between individuals, different peoples and cultures; between Catholics and Protestants, Buddhists and Muslims, believers and non-believers;
- b) To remember that the guidelines for the achievement of the common good at the various national and global levels, represented by the rights and duties of human beings, are due to the capacity for truth and the common good that is ‘seeded’ in every person and every

Riflessioni by the Pontifical Council, see also M. TOSO, *Réflexions sur la réforme du système monétaire et financier*, in ‘Liberté politique’, 57 (juin 2012), pp. 99-116.

people. It is ultimately rooted in the natural moral law, which allows us to discover and recognise the real rights, justice, virtue and eudaimonia. However, when political reason is considered to be a ‘creator’ *ex nihilo* of the moral order, as often happens, then justice and rights are at the mercy of the majority or minority groups that are able to impose their point of view on parliaments and legislators, and even succeed in encoding their will as rights. The rule of law just crumbles, as is evident today;¹⁵

- c) To encourage the pursuit of the common good without conflict and without indulging in endless and fruitless strife that retreats into its own shell. This stands in the way of understanding other people’s point of view and reasoning. It must be done by cultivating the culture of encounter and dialogue which Pope Francis insists on so much.¹⁶ Since everyone is capable of the common good, not only citizens but also their representatives must strive to attain it by focusing on what unites rather than what divides them. We do not only have the duty to work for it individually. We have an obligation to want it and to achieve it together, and to involve everyone, believers, non-believers and all people of good will. We must rise above differences between rulers and citizens, and between the elite and the people.¹⁷ When it comes to the common good, there are no alternative ways to social dialogue. Any other way involves rejection of others, exploitation, the abuse of power by the oligarchy over the weak, conflict, war and mutual annihilation;

¹⁵ The meta positive foundation of rights and duties, which are to be understood as universal, inviolable, inalienable and indivisible - note that civil and political rights cannot be achieved without social rights - helps to counteract those sectors of public opinion or of the leaders of the *polis*, according to which the necessary reorganisation of public accounts and growth, in a context of financial crisis and economic downturn, are to be achieved at the cost of the reduction of social rights. The indivisibility of rights, moreover, allows us to highlight other serious gaps and inconsistencies in the present action of the current political communities. For example, governments that, through the liberalisation of abortion, threaten the life of the weakest and the unborn, do not appear to have a firm moral hold and manifest discontinuity in relation to the integrity and complexity of life. Support for the right to full and sustainable development, the right to peace, clean water and work, cannot be separated from support for the fundamental right to life, the right to religious freedom and to conscientious objection to laws and government measures that threaten human dignity, such as abortion and euthanasia.

¹⁶ Cf. For example, J. M. BERGOGLIO, *Noi come cittadini. Noi come popolo. Verso un bicentenario in giustizia e solidarietà. 2010-2016*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana-Jaca Book, Città del Vaticano-Milano 2013, p. 73.

¹⁷ Cf *ib.*, p. 31.

- d) To seek the national common good within the regional and the global common good, and thus stimulate or create political and democratic institutions for that purpose. Today, unfortunately, in this respect we have to go against the current. This is because the existing international institutions – both because of nonperformance and poor governance – are not always exemplary.

3. *The promotion of the Social Doctrine or Teaching of the Church*

The political commitment of Catholics is implemented as a response to a vocation – there is, in fact, a Christian vocation to politics – to serve the common good. It is to give consistent and lasting responses to citizens' expectations and to live, day by day, with love full of truth, “*caritas in veritate*”, which Christ gives to every believer through his Spirit.

Since political action on the part of a Christian is the action of a believer, it must meet some basic requirements. Among these we can enumerate: Christian love; consistency with the faith they profess; moral rigour; the ability to discern right from wrong, the fair from the unfair and the necessary from the superfluous; a virtuous life; the ability to express an opinion in line with cultural tradition and its sources; professional competence and, not least, ‘passion’ for the common good.¹⁸

However, believers who wish to devote themselves to the service of the common good in and through politics cannot disregard the fact that this requires the channeling of currents of opinion. They should direct them to public institutions in order to promote standards. Where possible, they can govern or participate in governments in consonance with these standards.

In the nineteen-sixties and seventies, and even later, especially in Europe and Latin America, there were groups who were able to respond to the need for structures in which a Christian could be involved. They proposed political projects for government with the purpose of transforming society.

¹⁸ Cf. J. MIRÓ I ARDÈVOL, *La necessità di nuovi soggetti politici e di nuovi progetti culturali*, in PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS, *Testimoni di Cristo nella comunità politica*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2011, pp. 150-152.

Moreover, they made participation possible from the local level right up to the national and international levels. Whatever our opinion of that period and the failure of some of those organisations due to their lack of renewal and to corruption, the fact is that Catholics had a clear sphere of influence and the Church itself had a permanent interlocutor that was well defined, although imperfect. Today, unfortunately, in many countries there is a political vacuum, and this is even more evident at international and supranational levels. The presence of Catholics is characterised by the diaspora and often by cultural irrelevance in relation to key issues in respect of which we should be vigilant and proactive.

It is not easy to fill the political vacuum and the lack of an effective presence on the part of Catholics because there do not seem to be sufficient platforms for discussion of the problems. If, because of low numbers, inability to dialogue among themselves or lack of preparation and lack of conviction, Catholics are presently unable to form new political organisations, they must not fail to put into motion movements that can help them to build up cultural projects and policies that can be shared, consistent with their identity and with the complexity of the social problems.

However, it is precisely on this level that those who accompany Catholics in public life are called upon to speak out about the absolute need for the Social Doctrine of the Church. This can give rise to cultural movements and give them an initial design that can be used in elaborating political projects. Without a pre-existing broad cultural movement, and without guidelines of Christian inspiration, it is difficult to live out the social dimension of faith and to reach a common understanding that grows and becomes clearer mainly through the work of ongoing education. Today, the development of new cultural and political projects is not laborious or difficult, unlike in the last century when Catholics did not have the facility of a summary of the social teaching of the Church.

If we want to invent and develop ‘new’ Codes or cultural projects, such as those of Malines or Camaldoli, nowadays we no longer have to start from scratch and take a long and winding path. In fact, there is already something very similar to a ‘Code’ which is up to date and comprehensive. This is the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*,¹⁹ now translated into many languages including Arabic. Just a few years ago, as mentioned above, in order to design a plan, Catholics had to engage in a complex work of exegesis and reviewing of various social encyclicals.

The *Compendium* is a cultural tool, motivated and structured theologically, ecclesiologically and anthropologically. It is built on the grounds of faith and on reflective wisdom, and it provides a rational and supra-rational basis for social commitment. It helps us to become aware of the hope that is in every believer. It shows the specific ways in which faith becomes culture. It is the soul of transcendent humanism. It gives life to the various ethos and civil institutions in a spirit of relational fellowship.

The *Compendium* is a legacy that Blessed John Paul II has left for believers and all people of good will. It is a blueprint for the way forward in the Third Millennium as we set forth towards a “civilisation of love”.

Its purpose was to be a common grammar available to everyone, yes, but especially to Catholics in the diaspora, to help them to be united and thus to be able to have a greater role in the human story. It allows them to escape the deserts of parochialism, individualism, false preconceptions and the underworld of history. It enables them to be present with the redemptive and transfiguring love of Christ in the various “peripheries” of life. It is a translation of the public dimension of Christianity.

In order to foster friendship that is thoughtful and forward-looking, it defends both individual and community convictions, the requirements for freedom and justice.

¹⁹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2004 (= *Compendium*).

In order to be translated into constructive action, it should be studied scientifically through the contribution of many skills. It should be integrated as described in *Caritas in Veritate*, without neglecting the subject of the mass media. It should become historicised planning that includes a simultaneous process of education to the ‘good life’ spoken of in the Gospel.²⁰

It is, above all, a case of transposing it into political language, as Joseph Lazzati used to say when talking about social doctrine. He felt that Catholics did not seem able to exploit it for the purposes of transforming society.

Today, in particular, confronted with global imbalances, we must respond to the demands of freedom and social justice. We must do so according to the high measure of the common good of the human family and raise institutions proportionate to the new body of interconnections and planetary communications in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. We must not only globalise market institutions, but also those that are non-market, like substantive democracy, which is “high-intensity democracy”: social, economic, political, representative and participatory. We must formulate economic and social policies that are aimed at the common good, with special attention to the poorest, in accordance with equity. It is a question of gathering and combining, in the context of the common good, the links between life ethics and social ethics – the “people of life” is not to be set up against the “people of peace”, and vice versa –, between economics, fellowship and social justice, between human ecology and environmental ecology, between the private and the public, the local and the global. We need positive secularism, unfragmented pluralism, and multiculturalism that are based on the common search for truth.

Therefore, more than anything else, we must proceed to indicate outlines of policy according to the various social areas, corresponding in part to the

²⁰ On this topic, see, for example, CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Educare alla vita buona del Vangelo. Orientamenti pastorali per il decennio 2010-2020* (2010).

chapters of the *Compendium*: people's rights and duties, civil society, family, human work, economic activity, political community and religious community, environment, bioethics, international community, peace, and communications media.

Where can we find the strength and inspiration to develop new projects? We certainly find it through our experience of faith. It is also essential to have the joint contribution of intellectuals and the people who personally experience these social issues. Lastly, it is very important to have the contribution of cultural institutions, associations or groups that, on the basis of their engagement in the field, already work on policy and civil projects to be used in that activity. We think of the Catholic social weeks and of the associations that spring up around the themes of science in relation to life, the environment and to work. Nor should we forget the various forums of family associations, unions and many professional groups.

To draw up a Code, there is no need, *per se*, to mobilise the whole Catholic world. At certain times in history of wait-and-see policies and disorientation, as we have now, prophetic shock minorities become decisive. This was maintained by Jacques Maritain in his time.

What we want to emphasise here is that there must be people or institutions available to add to the reflection, to build new thought and new projects and to support a Movement of movements, the absence of which is being recognised in several countries. This is an essential pre-condition with respect to all the rest. Before, or while, we think of reforming or establishing new parties, before we put in the pipeline strategies for the immediate future or attempt to change the laws in force, it is necessary to have a sufficiently detailed and updated cultural framework. We must have people who have a fresh way of thinking and renewed hearts, and who are prepared spiritually as well as professionally.

4. *Pastoral accompaniment*

“If membership and a sense of ecclesial communion are central for the social and political engagement of Christians, it is important to be aware of times and places where they can be guided and be nourished in their faith, for discernment of their commitments and their choices and to support them in their ‘good fight’. A renewed, demanding and consistent presence of Catholics in public life should never be reduced to their specific political commitments”.²¹

The pastoral accompaniment of Catholics has now become quite a common institutionalised practice. Proof of this is the formation of 'chaplains' in various countries and the presence at this *First Meeting* of a fair number of people who, in different ways, are responsible for this task. To repeatedly point out in various speeches and conferences that there is an existing deficit in respect of investments in education and pastoral training for new generations of Catholics involved in politics, in the long run could become tedious and frustrating. It is important that the Church communities in the various associations and organisations and in movements of Catholic and Christian inspiration finally take concrete action. Above all, we must begin to prepare new generations of priests and bishops who can offer believers valuable spiritual and cultural guidance, not only by increasing social catechesis, but also by major pastoral action that solicits and accompanies young people and adults in accepting and living out their Christian vocation in social and political commitment. New generations of Catholics who are prepared to deal with the social and political realities of their time, do not suddenly sprout like mushrooms. The same can be said for Catholic leadership. If, after the past experiences of parties of Christian inspiration, there is an increasing vacuum in the organised presence of Catholics, this is not only due to a lack of courage on the part of the *christifideles laici*, but also because of a lack of adequate pastoral care. While in the past many pastors were very active and

²¹ G. M. CARRIQUIRY LECOUR, *Criteri e modalità per la formazione dei fedeli laici all'impegno politico*, in PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS, *Testimoni di Cristo nella comunità politica*, p. 140.

sometimes even too loquacious when they told people how to vote from the pulpit, now it seems that the clergy have become quite aphasic and inattentive.

There definitely does not seem to be consistency with Council teaching when there are pastoral practices that tend to establish systematic summit relations between the Church and governments but that bypass or minimise the responsibilities of Catholic politicians that are active in the various political parties, almost making their presence and their work of mediation unnecessary. In order to keep alive their vocation and Christian awareness in political action, to bear witness in the service of the common good and to maintain their communion with the Church, parishes, associations, organisations and movements are certainly useful places. However, sometimes these environments are insufficient to meet the need felt by Catholics who are involved in the various fields of action and debate in public life. It is therefore necessary to have other 'meeting places', that is, *ad hoc* institutions and movements. While these bring together representatives of various Catholic groups and those of Christian inspiration, they are able to discuss the thorniest problems frankly and with mutual respect. They also, in the light of the Word of God and of the Church's social doctrine, draw up qualified responses and new cultural and political projects to offer their country a quality of life that only transcendent faith can nourish.²²

Pastoral guidance can be understood in different ways. First of all, it can be done with a personal approach through encounter and dialogue. However, we should not rule out collective, communal accompaniment that respects the autonomy of decision-making on the part of the *christifideles laici*, including their plural presence in the political arena in general.

It has been said that, in today's pluralistic context that is culturally fragmented and marked by aggressive secularism, one of the tasks of those who accompany Catholics in their service to the common good is to

²² Cf. POPE FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2013, nos. 50-55.

encourage them to seriously and effectively cultivate the public dimension of Christianity.

With respect to this and to the ‘laws’ of democratic life that are also based on the majority principle, it is necessary to move on from an ideology of diaspora and the unrealistic belief that, in the social field, it is sufficient to have unity of moral purpose, and to leave out of consideration any kind of external moral unity that takes the form of transversal alliances or of parties of Christian inspiration. How could we, if we stay in the diaspora, deal adequately with supranational dynamics? They, as pointed out by Pope Francis, often contain a “globalisation of indifference”, “the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose”.²³ In the current climate of lack of respect for religious freedom and sometimes contempt towards Christianity – unfortunately the episodes are multiplying even in the European context, especially because of aggressive and anti-Catholic secularism –, can we think of political representatives, far from the Church, taking charge of the legitimate interests of social, cultural and civic institutions that are in the Catholic realm? Is it not necessary, in this context, to rethink our representation so that values are well supported that would not otherwise be accepted in parliamentary debate and the absence of which would be harmful to everyone?

It has been said, even by distinguished Catholic thinkers, that after the Second Vatican Council it is historically and theologically impossible for the emergence of political parties of Christian inspiration because it would necessarily fall into dangerous short circuits. From the point of view of political logic, this is equivalent to perpetrating a robbery and relegating the Catholic laity to being a ‘minority’ in public participation.

In practice, its members would have to support only parties founded by other groups, as if they were second-class citizens, inherently incapable of establishing new formations together with other people of good will. On the contrary, the Second Vatican Council recognises that believers have

²³ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2013, nos. 54-55.

clear political autonomy.²⁴ This autonomy implies that individual Catholics, when duly prepared, can choose not only to operate within the various factions of the right, left or center, but also that, after having evaluated the historical conditions and the stakes, they can decide to breathe life into any non-religious parties, together with people of good will who share their values.²⁵ In order to ensure that the contribution of the Christian vision does not fall into insignificance, but instead is of benefit to all, why not imagine that among the ways forward, after having tried out the way of the diaspora and of irrelevance, that there are also other solutions, not excluding transversal alliances?²⁶ On this point, of course, it is up to Catholics who are active in different parties to make the necessary evaluations and to decide, on the basis of their number, on the opportunities and the urgent needs of their times. No one can do this for them, not even the hierarchy.

²⁴ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 43; Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 7.

²⁵ Cf. B. SORGE, *Il coraggio della speranza. Il ruolo dei fedeli laici nella vita pubblica*, ed. L. GRION and O. MARSON, Gabrielli Editore, Verona 2010, p. 54.

²⁶ The so-called *Estrela report on sexual and reproductive health and rights* was definitively rejected by the European Parliament in plenary session on 10 December 2013, thanks to the decision of some Catholic MEPs to abstain from voting, in opposition to their own parliamentary groups. If the text had been approved, the Member States of the European Union would have been strongly urged to guarantee for everybody, even the very young, abortion (without parental consent), contraception, assisted fertilisation, and to proceed with the re-education of teachers and the provision in schools of mandatory courses on gender identity. However, the urgent need for transversal alliances seems to be current also for other issues besides bioethics and biopolitics.