The Dignity of the Human Person

John XXIII wrote the basic principle of the social doctrine is that individual men and women are necessarily “the foundation, cause and end of all social institutions,…” (John XXIII, Mater et Magistra, 1961: 219) The council document Gaudium et Spes adds: “In the economic and social realms… the dignity and complete vocation of the human person and the welfare of society as a whole are to be respected and promoted. For man is the source, the centre, and the purpose of all economic and social life,” (Gaudium et Spes, 63).

The Supremacy of Truth

The Supreme good and moral good meet in truth: the truth of God, the Creator and Redeemer, and the truth of man, created and redeemed by him. Only upon this truth is it possible to construct a renewed society and to solve complex and weighty problems affecting it, above all, the problem of overcoming the various forms of totalitarianism, so as to make way for the authentic freedom of the person. “Totalitarianism arises out of a denial of truth in the objective sense. If there is no transcendent truth, in obedience to which man achieves his full identity, there is no sure principle for guaranteeing just relations between people. Their self-interest as a class, group or nation would inevitably set them in opposition to one another,” (John Paul II, Veritatis Splendor, 1993, 99).

The Common Good

By the common good is to be understood “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily” (Gaudium et Spes, 26).
“The common good concerns the life of all. It calls for prudence from each, and even more from those who exercise the office of authority. _It consists of three essential elements_: First, the common good presupposes respect for the person as such. In the name of the common good, public authorities are bound to respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person. Society should permit each of its members to fulfil his vocation. In particular, the common good resides in the conditions for the exercise of natural freedoms indispensable for the development of the human vocation, such as “the right to act according to a sound norm of conscience and to safeguard…privacy, and rightful freedom also in matters of religion” (Gaudium et Spes, 26).

Second, the common good requires the social well-being and development of the group itself. “Development is the epitome of all social duties. Certainly it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on. Finally, the common good requires peace, that is the stability and security of a just order. It presupposes that authority should ensure by morally acceptable means the security of society and its members. It is the basis of the right to legitimate personal and collective defence.” (Code of Canon Law, nn, 1906–1909).

**Justice for all**

Justice for all is based on the joint principles of _solidarity_ and _subsidiarity_. “African cultures have an acute sense of _solidarity_ and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best traditions.” (Ecclesia in Africa, 1995: 43).

“God has not willed to reserve to himself all exercise of power. He entrusts to every creature the functions it is capable of performing according to the capacities of its own nature. This mode of governance ought to be followed in social life. The way God acts in governing the