

THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN DEVELOPMENT

Since common good, is intimately bound up with human nature, it can never exist fully and completely unless the human person is taken into account at all times. Thus, attention must be paid to the basic nature of the common good and what it is that brings it about.

The principle of the common good, to which every aspect of life must be related if it is to attain its fullest meaning stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people.

The common good does not consist in the simple sum of the particular goods of each subject of a social entity. Belonging to everyone and to each person, it is and remains common because it is indivisible and because only together is it possible to attain it, increase it and safeguard its effectiveness with regard also to the future.

The common good involves every member of society, no one is exempt from cooperating according to each one's possibilities in attaining it and developing it. The tendency is to over-emphasize the individual good at the expense of the common good or vice versa. The individual good being for the benefit of the individual while the common good to that of the society. The common good must be served in its fullness, not according to reductionist visions that are subordinated by certain people to their own advantages; rather it is to be based on a logic that leads to the assumption of greater responsibility.

The common good corresponds to the highest human instincts, but it is a good that is very difficult to attain because it requires the constant ability and effort to seek the good of other as though it were one's own good.

Everyone also has the right to enjoy the conditions of social life that are brought about by the quest for the common good. The distribution of created goods which is labouring today under the gravest ills due to the huge disparity between the few exceedingly rich and the outnumbered propertiless must be effectively called back to and brought into conformity with the norms of the common good that is social justice.

TRUE COMMUNITIES AND THE COMMON GOOD

Community refers to a stable association of individuals working together towards a common objective (good). A society that wishes and intends to remain at the service of the human being at every level is a society that has the common good, the good of all people and of the whole person, as its primary goal.

A community as a whole should take responsibility for all its members so that no one is marginalized or neglected. A good test of a community is the way in which the disabled, disadvantaged and the handicapped are looked after. All the members should participate in some way and no one should be left passive or on the sidelines (Sperling 2004).

The common good can be understood as the social/community dimension of the moral good. Just as the moral actions of an individual are accomplished in doing what is good, so too the actions of a society attain their full stature when they bring about the common good.

The human being cannot find fulfillment in himself, which is apart from the fact that he exists with others and for others. A person is defined as a rational being capable of freely engaging in association with others. This does not simply require that he lives with others at various levels of social life but that he seeks unceasingly in actual practice and not merely at the level of ideas the good found in existing forms of social life.

No expression of social life (family, associations, cities, regions states) can escape the issue of its own common good, in that this is a constitutive element of its significance and the authentic reason for its very existence.

Tasks of the political community

The responsibility for attaining the common good also belongs to the state since the common good is the reason that the political authority exists. It is in the nature of the common good that every single citizen has the right to share in it—although in different ways, depending on his tasks, merits and circumstances. Hence, every civil authority must strive to promote the common good in the interest of all, without favoring any individual citizen or category of citizen. Nevertheless, considerations of justice and equity can at times demand that those in power pay more attention to the weaker members of society, since these are at a disadvantage when it comes to defending their own rights and asserting their legitimate interests (*Pope John XXIII 1963*).

The individual person, family or intermediate groups are not able to achieve their full development themselves for living a truly human life. Hence, the necessity of political institutions whose purpose is to make the necessary material, cultural, moral and spiritual goods available.

The role of the holders of authority is to lift up those under them until they achieve their maximum capacity for good and this capacity is rooted in the intelligence and free creativity of every human being from the moment of conception.

The right to life is the most basic human right precisely for the sake of the common good. Taking into account man's orientation to infinity in his intelligence and freedom, his highest and most lofty fundamental right is that of worshipping God.

In between those two rights to life and to religious freedom, we find all other human rights: rights to bodily integrity, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care and social services; then there are rights pertaining to moral and cultural values such as the right to be respected as a person, to freedom of research, to education in proportion to each one's capacity, of opinion, of expression and of artistic creation within the limits laid down by the moral order and the common good; then the right to worship God privately and publicly; then the right to choose freely one's state in life, and the rights of children and parents; then the economic rights to private initiative and enterprise, to proper working conditions, to employment, to adequate remuneration, and to private property bearing in mind that there is a social duty essentially inherent in the right of private property; then the right of meeting and association, the right to emigrate and immigrate, political rights and the right to juridical protection and due process of law.

Every nation is required by duty to make towards a true worldwide cooperation for the common good of the whole of humanity and for future generations. To ensure the common good, the government of each country has the specific duty to harmonize the different sectoral interests with the requirements of justice. The proper reconciling of the particular goods of groups and those of individuals is in fact one of the most delicate tasks of public authority.

Moreover in the democratic state where decisions are usually made by the majority of representatives elected by the people, those responsible for government are required to interpret the common good of their country not only according to the guidelines of the majority but also according to the effective good of all members of the community including the minority.

The universal destination of goods and private property

The universal destination of goods requires a common effort to obtain for every person and for all peoples the conditions necessary for integral development so that everyone can contribute to making a more humane world in which each individual can give and receive and in which the progress of some will no longer be an obstacle to the development of others nor a pretext for their enslavement.

Common good and private property

Man has a natural right to private property because of

- a) His rational nature whereby he uses his reason to provide for his future which he could not do if he had no right to possess material things
- b) His social nature which prompts him to provide for his own family which he can only do if he has stable property.

Every man as a living being endowed with reason, has in fact and by nature the fundamental right to use the material goods of the earth, although it has been left to the human will and to the juridical frameworks of peoples to regulate more particularly its practical implementation.

Whatever the form of ownership may be, as adapted to the legitimate institutions of people according to diverse and changeable circumstances, attention must be paid to the universal purpose for which created goods are meant. In using them therefore, a man should regard his lawful possessions not merely as his own but also as common property in the sense that they should accrue to the benefit not only of himself but of others. Hence the right to private property is not absolute.

The right to private property is understood within the broader context of the right common to all to use the goods of the whole of creation, the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone. The subordination of private ownership to the common good implies the spirit of detachment from material things. It is not morally wrong to be or to become rich: what is morally wrong and unjust is to use riches for selfish purposes and not for the common good.

Individual person may not use their resources without considering the effects that this use will have; rather they must act in a way that benefits not only themselves and their family but also the common good. From this there arises the duty on the part of owners not to let the goods in their possession go idle and to channel them to productive activity, even entrusting them to others who are desirous and capable of putting them to use in production.

The principle of the universal destination of goods should be extended to include the latest developments brought about by economic and technological progress. New technological and scientific knowledge must be placed at the service of mankind's primary needs, gradually increasing humanity's common patrimony. It requires action at the international level and planned action on the part of countries. It is necessary to break down barriers and monopolies which leave so many countries on the margins of development, and to provide all individuals and nations with the basic conditions that will enable them to share in development.

The requirements of the common good regarding material possessions can be summed up in three:

- a) The obligation to invest surplus wealth into the economic process so as to promote more employment and more wealth.
- b) The obligation to pay a just salary i.e. above mere subsistence level, taking into account the needs of the family.
- c) The obligation to avoid the huge accumulation of lands or money leading to a despotic political domination by the few. In other words to refrain from using economic power for selfish political ends.

The common good immanent to society consists in a social, cultural and juridical setting or A situation which is ideal or most conducive to facilitate the fulfilment of every individual therein and of every family and group. A human being has a right to this upbringing and society has the corresponding duty to respect his right to honor it, society meaning parents, relatives, teachers, mentors and all educational, administrative and informative agencies.

The principle of subsidiarity

Since man is endowed with intelligence and freedom, he has the power to shape his own destiny. However, he is made in such a way that he cannot develop without the help of his fellow human beings. The principle of subsidiarity consists in recognizing the power of man and allowing him freedom of self development and refraining from paternalistic spoon feeding.

This then is the role of authority, whether parental, civil, academic, professional or religious: to foster and develop the freedom and responsibility of those under it, and thus to uplift them and make them self reliant.

Man cannot develop his own powers from the lowest to the highest (intelligence and free will) without the help of his fellow human beings). So it is natural for a man to be born in a family and to be brought up by his parents. But he is intelligent and free and consequently his upbringing must be in keeping with his rational and free nature.

The model of his upbringing must be the training of intelligent beings who respond to reason and values beyond the threshold of sensitive feelings of pleasure and pain to which animals respond. The education of children has to be an education for freedom and independence, an education for self help and self reliance: children must be taught from the earliest years how to appreciate things, how to respect money as the product of human work and how to earn their own living.

The role of parents in educating their children is a subsidiary task. They must help the children to help themselves avoiding protectionism and possessiveness. Other people violate this right if they try to break up a marriage and the state violates it if it does not allow parents to choose their own schools for their children. The purpose of upbringing is to enable the children to live an independent life.

Hence, the principle of subsidiarity whereby whatever can be done by the smaller body should not be done by the larger one. Thus, whatever can be done by the child alone should not be done for him (he has to learn the hard way, not the soft way that leads to spoiling) and whatever can be done by private initiatives should not be done by the government. This is what fosters active creativity and a sense of responsibility and as to how to apply the principle of subsidiarity in each case, the prudential judgement of the authority concerned should decide in accordance with the needs of the common good and the circumstances of the subject. i.e. for the education of good members of society, who have learnt to love giving more than receiving. If the good of the family is fostered, promoted and protected by the family, individuals are in position to grow up to their fulfillment in the best possible environment. The effectiveness of all other educational agencies depends on this primary and natural school for life: the family.

Humanity is full of needs. Who is going to supply these needs/ since we are free to help ourselves, we are the first ones who have to supply our own needs to the extent that we are capable. Needs give rise to duties. But if through no fault of our own we cannot do it, others will have to come to our aid.

This is the principle of subsidiarity, help others only if they really need it: otherwise, respect their freedom and teach them to act according to their personal responsibility. This is the way to practice subsidiarity making others believe and trust in their own talents without being dependent on others stimulate their creativity so that they can be givers rather than receivers.

All the forces engaged in the promotion of the common good must be at the service of the family, since the family is the fundamental school for the common good. Everyone has a duty to promote economic growth, to create wealth and to remedy material poverty as much as possible so that no one can fail to use his or her talents fully for the enrichment of mankind

The principle of solidarity

Solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity.

True solidarity, though it begins with an acknowledgment of the equal worth of the other, comes to fulfillment only when we willingly place my life at the service of the other. Herein lies the 'vertical' dimension of solidarity: I am moved to make myself less than the other so as to minister to his or her needs.

The very rapid expansion in ways and means of communication such as those offered by information technology, the extraordinary advances in computer technology, the increased volume of commerce and information exchange all bear witness to the fact that for the first time since the beginning of human history, it is now possible, at least technically, to establish relationships between people who are separated by great distances and are unknown to each other.

In the presence of the phenomenon of interdependence and its constant expansion however, there persist in every part of the world, stark inequalities between developed and developing countries, inequalities stoked also by various forms of exploitation, oppression and corruption that have a negative influence on the internal and international life of many states

Solidarity is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good- good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all. It is a virtue par excellence to the common good and is found in a commitment to the good of one's neighbor with the readiness to lose oneself for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him and to serve him instead of oppressing him for one's own advantage.

Further Reading

1. Micah Cheserem (2005): The virtues of a good political leader in E. Oketch, L. Franceschi and P. Mimbi (eds) *Politics and the common good* . Nairobi: Strathmore university press, 121-126
2. Richard Leakey (2005) Responsibility and the common good in E. Oketch, L. Franceschi and P. Mimbi (eds) *Politics and the common good* . Nairobi: Strathmore university press, 127-130