Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the 14th Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to have this occasion to meet with you as you gather for the fourteenth Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. Over the last two decades, the Academy has offered a valuable contribution to the deepening and development of the Church's social doctrine and its application in the areas of law, economics, politics and the various other social sciences. I thank Professor Margaret Archer for her kind words of greeting, and I express my sincere appreciation to all of you for your commitment to research, dialogue and teaching, so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ may continue to shed light on the complex situations arising in a rapidly changing world.

In choosing the theme *Pursuing the Common Good: How Solidarity and Subsidiarity Can Work Together,* you have decided to examine the interrelationships between four fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching: the dignity of the human person, the common good, subsidiarity and solidarity (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 160-163). These key realities, which emerge from the living contact between the Gospel and concrete social circumstances, offer a framework for viewing and addressing the imperatives facing mankind at the dawn of the twenty-first century, such as reducing inequalities in the distribution of goods, expanding opportunities for education, fostering sustainable growth and development, and protecting the environment.

How can solidarity and subsidiarity work together in the pursuit of the common good in a way that

not only respects human dignity, but allows it to flourish? This is the heart of the matter which concerns you. As your preliminary discussions have already revealed, a satisfactory answer can only surface after careful examination of the meaning of the terms (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Chapter 4). *Human dignity* is the intrinsic value of a person created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by Christ. The totality of social conditions allowing persons to achieve their communal and individual fulfilment is known as the *common good*. *Solidarity* refers to the virtue enabling the human family to share fully the treasure of material and spiritual goods, and *subsidiarity* is the coordination of society's activities in a way that supports the internal life of the local communities.

Yet definitions are only the beginning. What is more, these definitions are adequately grasped only when linked organically to one another and seen as mutually supportive of one another. We can initially sketch the interconnections between these four principles by placing the dignity of the person at the intersection of two axes: one horizontal, representing "solidarity" and "subsidiarity", and one vertical, representing the "common good". This creates a field upon which we can plot the various points of Catholic social teaching that give shape to the common good.

Though this graphic analogy gives us a rudimentary picture of how these fundamental principles imply one another and are necessarily interwoven, we know that the reality is much more complex. Indeed, the unfathomable depths of the human person and mankind's marvellous capacity for spiritual communion – realities which are fully disclosed only through divine revelation – far exceed the capacity of schematic representation. The solidarity that binds the human family, and the subsidiary levels reinforcing it from within, must however always be placed within the horizon of the mysterious life of the Triune God (cf. *Jn* 5:26; 6:57), in whom we perceive an ineffable love shared by equal, though nonetheless distinct, persons (cf. *Summa Theologiae,* I, q. 42).

My friends, I invite you to allow this fundamental truth to permeate your reflections: not only in the sense that the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity are undoubtedly enriched by our belief in the Trinity, but particularly in the sense that these principles have the potential to place men and women on the path to discovering their definitive, supernatural destiny. The natural human inclination to live in community is confirmed and transformed by the "oneness of Spirit" which God has bestowed upon his adopted sons and daughters (cf. *Eph* 4:3; *1 Pet* 3:8). Consequently, the responsibility of Christians to work for peace and justice, their irrevocable commitment to build up the common good, is inseparable from their mission to proclaim the gift of eternal life to which God has called every man and woman. In this regard, the *tranquillitas ordinis* of which Saint Augustine speaks refers to "*all* things": that is to say both "civil peace", which is a "concord among citizens", and the "peace of the heavenly city", which is the "perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God, and of one another in God" (*De Civitate Dei,* XIX, 13).

The eyes of faith permit us to see that the heavenly and earthly cities interpenetrate and are intrinsically ordered to one another, inasmuch as they both belong to God the Father, who is "above all and through all and in all" (*Eph* 4:6). At the same time, faith places into sharper focus the due autonomy of earthly affairs, insofar as they are "endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 36). Hence, you can be assured that your discussions will be of service to all people of good will, while simultaneously inspiring Christians to

embrace more readily their obligation to enhance solidarity with and among their fellow citizens, and to act upon the principle of subsidiarity by promoting family life, voluntary associations, private initiative, and a public order that facilitates the healthy functioning of society's most basic communities (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 187).

When we examine the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity in the light of the Gospel, we realize that they are not simply "horizontal": they both have an essentially vertical dimension. Jesus commands us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (cf. *Lk* 6:31); to love our neighbour as ourselves (cf. *Mat* 22:35). These laws are inscribed by the Creator in man's very nature (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 31). Jesus teaches that this love calls us to lay down our lives for the good of others (cf. *Jn* 15:12-13). In this sense, true solidarity – though it begins with an acknowledgment of the *equal* worth of the other – comes to fulfilment only when I willingly place my life at the service of the other (cf. *Eph* 6:21). 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 (cf. *Jn* 13:14-15), just as Jesus "humbled himself" so as to give men and women a share in his divine life with the Father and the Spirit (cf. *Phil* 2:8; *Mat* 23:12).

Similarly, subsidiarity – insofar as it encourages men and women to enter freely into life-giving relationships with those to whom they are most closely connected and upon whom they most immediately depend, and demands of higher authorities respect for these relationships – manifests a "vertical" dimension pointing towards the Creator of the social order (cf. *Rom* 12:16, 18). A society that honours the principle of subsidiarity liberates people from a sense of despondency and hopelessness, granting them the freedom to engage with one another in the spheres of commerce, politics and culture (cf. *Quadragesimo Anno*, 80). When those responsible for the public good attune themselves to the natural human desire for self-governance based on subsidiarity, they leave space for individual responsibility and initiative, but most importantly, they leave space for *love* (cf. *Rom* 13:8; *Deus Caritas Est*, 28), which always remains "the most excellent way" (cf. *1 Cor* 12:31).

In revealing the Father's love, Jesus has taught us not only how to live as brothers and sisters here on earth; he has shown us that he himself is the way to perfect communion with one another and with God in the world to come, since it is through him that "we have access in one Spirit to the Father" (cf. *Eph* 2:18). As you strive to articulate the ways in which men and women can best promote the common good, I encourage you to survey both the "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions of solidarity and subsidiarity. In this way, you will be able to propose more effective ways of resolving the manifold problems besetting mankind at the threshold of the third millennium, while also bearing witness to the primacy of love, which transcends and fulfils justice as it draws mankind into the very life of God (cf. *Message for the 2004 World Day of Peace*).

With these sentiments, I assure you of my prayers, and I cordially extend my Apostolic Blessing to you and your loved ones as a pledge of peace and joy in the Risen Lord.

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