

*Let us keep in mind the principle of subsidiarity, which grants freedom to develop the capabilities present at every level of society, while also demanding a greater sense of responsibility for the common good from those who wield greater power.*

Laudato Si' ("Praise Be"), Pope Francis, 2015, Chapter 5, #196.

Still, that most weighty principle, which cannot be set aside or changed, remains fixed and unshaken in social philosophy: Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.

**Quadragesimo Anno ("After Forty Years")**, Pope Pius XI, 1931, #79.

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But however extensive and far-reaching the influence of the State on the economy may be, it must never be exerted to the extent of depriving the individual citizen of his freedom of action. It must rather augment his freedom while effectively guaranteeing the protection of his essential personal rights. Moreover, as history itself testifies with ever-increasing clarity, there can be no such thing as a well-ordered and prosperous society unless individual citizens and the State co-operate in the economy. Both sides must work together in harmony, and their respective efforts must be proportioned to the needs of the common good in the prevailing circumstances and conditions of human life.

**Mater et Magistra ("Mother and Teacher")**, Pope John XXIII, 1961, #55-56.

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State and public ownership of property is very much on the increase today. This is explained by the exigencies of the common good, which demand that public authority broaden its sphere of activity. But here, too, the "principle of subsidiary function" must be observed. The State and other agencies of public law must not extend their ownership beyond what is clearly required by considerations of the common good properly understood, and even then there must be safeguards. Otherwise private ownership could be reduced beyond measure, or, even worse, completely destroyed.

**Mater et Magistra ("Mother and Teacher")**, Pope John XXIII, 1961, #117.

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Private enterprise too must contribute to an economic and social balance in the different areas of the same political community. Indeed, in accordance with "the principle of subsidiary function," public authority must encourage and assist private enterprise, entrusting to it, wherever possible, the continuation of economic development.

**Mater et Magistra ("Mother and Teacher")**, Pope John XXIII, 1961, #152.

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The same principle of subsidiarity which governs the relations between public authorities and individuals, families and intermediate societies in a single State, must also apply to the relations between the public authority of the world community and the public authorities of each political community. The special function of this universal authority must be to evaluate and find a solution to economic, social, political and cultural problems which affect the universal common good. These are problems which, because of their extreme gravity, vastness and urgency, must be considered too difficult for the rulers of individual States to solve with any degree of success.

**Pacem in Terris (“Peace on Earth”)**, Pope John XXIII, 1963, #140.

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It is for the international community to coordinate and stimulate development, but in such a way as to distribute with the maximum fairness and efficiency the resources set aside for this purpose. It is also its task to organize economic affairs on a world scale, without transgressing the principle of subsidiarity, so that business will be conducted according to the norms of justice. Organizations should be set up to promote and regulate international commerce, especially with less developed nations, in order to compensate for losses resulting from excessive inequality of power between nations. This kind of organization accompanied by technical, cultural, and financial aid, should provide developing nations with all that is necessary for them to achieve adequate economic success.

**Gaudium et Spes (“The Church in the Modern World”)**, Vatican II, 1965, #86(c).

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The primary norm for determining the scope and limits of governmental intervention is the “principle of subsidiarity” cited above. This principle states that, in order to protect basic justice, government should undertake only those initiatives which exceed the capacities of individuals or private groups acting independently. Government should not replace or destroy smaller communities and individual initiative. Rather it should help them contribute more effectively to social well-being and supplement their activity when the demands of justice exceed their capacities. This does not mean, however, that the government that governs least, governs best. Rather it defines good government intervention as that which truly “helps” other social groups contribute to the common good by directing, urging, restraining, and regulating economic activity as “the occasion requires and necessity demands”.

**Economic Justice for All**, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986, #124.

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The “principle of subsidiarity” must be respected: “A community of a higher order should not interfere with the life of a community of a lower order, taking over its functions.” In case of need it should, rather, support the smaller community and help to coordinate its activity with activities in the rest of society for the sake of the common good.

**Centesimus Annus (“The Hundredth Year,” Donders translation)**, Pope John Paul II, 1991, #48.

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Others welcome the teaching on the “option for the poor,” the duties of government to protect the weak, the warnings against unbridled capitalism, but seem to ignore the centrality of family, the emphasis on economic initiative, and the warnings against the bureaucratic excesses of a “social assistance” state. Our social tradition is a moral framework, not a partisan platform or ideological tool. It challenges both right and left, labor and management to focus on the dignity of the human person and the common good rather than their own political or economic interests.

**A Decade after “Economic Justice for All:” Continuing Principles, Changing Context, New Challenges,** National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1995.

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It is true that the pursuit of justice must be a fundamental norm of the State and that the aim of a just social order is to guarantee to each person, according to the principle of subsidiarity, his share of the community’s goods. This has always been emphasized by Christian teaching on the State and by the Church’s social doctrine.

**Deus Caritas Est (“God is Love”),** Pope Benedict XVI, 2005, #26.

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Love—caritas—will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable.[20] The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person—every person—needs: namely, loving personal concern. We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. The Church is one of those living forces: she is alive with the love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ. This love does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, something which often is even more necessary than material support. In the end, the claim that just social structures would make works of charity superfluous masks a materialist conception of man: the mistaken notion that man can live “by bread alone” (Mt 4:4; cf. Dt 8:3)—a conviction that demeans man and ultimately disregards all that is specifically human.

**Deus Caritas Est (“God is Love”),** Pope Benedict XVI, 2005, #28b.

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The strengthening of different types of businesses, especially those capable of viewing profit as a means for achieving the goal of a more humane market and society, must also be pursued in those countries that are excluded or marginalized from the influential circles of the global economy. In these countries it is very important to move ahead with projects based on subsidiarity, suitably planned and managed, aimed at affirming rights yet also providing for the assumption of corresponding responsibilities. In development programmes, the principle of the centrality of the human person, as the subject primarily responsible for development, must be preserved. The principal concern must be to improve the actual living conditions of the people in a given region, thus enabling them to carry out those duties which their poverty does not

presently allow them to fulfil. Social concern must never be an abstract attitude. Development programmes, if they are to be adapted to individual situations, need to be flexible; and the people who benefit from them ought to be directly involved in their planning and implementation.

**Caritas in Veritate (“Charity in Truth”)**, Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, #47.

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A particular manifestation of charity and a guiding criterion for fraternal cooperation between believers and non-believers is undoubtedly the principle of subsidiarity, an expression of inalienable human freedom. Subsidiarity is first and foremost a form of assistance to the human person via the autonomy of intermediate bodies. Such Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development. It has also to do with the overall welfare of society and the development of a variety of intermediate groups, applying the principle of subsidiarity. Outstanding among those groups is the family, as the basic cell of society. Finally, the common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good.

**Laudato Si’ (“Praise Be”)**, Pope Francis, 2015, Chapter 4, #157.

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assistance is offered when individuals or groups are unable to accomplish something on their own, and it is always designed to achieve their emancipation, because it fosters freedom and participation through assumption of responsibility. Subsidiarity respects personal dignity by recognizing in the person a subject who is always capable of giving something to others. By considering reciprocity as the heart of what it is to be a human being, subsidiarity is the most effective antidote against any form of all-encompassing welfare state.

**Caritas in Veritate (“Charity in Truth”)**, Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, #57-58.

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[T]he principle of subsidiarity is particularly well-suited to managing globalization and directing it towards authentic human development. In order not to produce a dangerous universal power of a tyrannical nature, the governance of globalization must be marked by subsidiarity, articulated into several layers and involving different levels that can work together. Globalization certainly requires authority, insofar as it poses the problem of a global common good that needs to be pursued. This authority, however, must be organized in a subsidiary and stratified way[138], if it is not to infringe upon freedom and if it is to yield effective results in practice.

**Caritas in Veritate (“Charity in Truth”)**, Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, #57-58.

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The principle of subsidiarity must remain closely linked to the principle of solidarity and vice versa, since the former without the latter gives way to social privatism, while the latter without the former gives way to paternalist social assistance that is demeaning to those in need.

**Caritas in Veritate (“Charity in Truth”)**, Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, #57-58.

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It is the responsibility of the State to safeguard and promote the common good of society.[188] Based on the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, and fully committed to political dialogue and consensus building, it plays a fundamental role, one which cannot be delegated, in working for the integral development of all. This role, at present, calls for profound social humility.

**Evangelii Gaudium (“Joy of the Gospel”)**, Pope Francis, 2013, Chapter 4, #240.

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