

The Principles as Criteria for Discernment

Becoming Builders and Weavers of Hope · *Magnifica Humanitas* · Leo XIV

“Social Doctrine as a shared discernment

“Social Doctrine of the Church is a legacy of wisdom, where we find principles for thought, criteria for discernment and judgment, and concrete guidelines for action. Founded on Sacred Scripture and Tradition, and in engagement with the sciences, it helps us clearly interpret the challenges of the present and identify appropriate ways for living out a clear Christian witness, with joy and in service to the world.” §§ 3

Take each principle in turn. Read what it asks. Then let the question sit before you, and write what comes.

1. Human Dignity

§§ 48–58 · the foundation

“The human person: image of the Triune God.” Dignity is given, not earned; no exclusion can diminish it — and no measure of usefulness can increase it. Leo XIV treats human dignity as the foundation from which the principles arise, and enumerates the common good, the universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, solidarity, social justice — which includes the preferential option for the poor — and integral human development (§ 82). Charity underlies the whole, expressed through fraternity, solidarity, and justice (cf. §§ 73, 77).

Is the person here treated as an end, or as a means?

2. The Common Good

§§ 59–64

The “common good sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.” For Benedict it is a non-negotiable as in of the dignity of the person. Interdependency where we work for a common vision. State’s responsibility to ensure cohesion, unity and the proper organization of civil society.

Who is currently outside the circle of whom this is for?

3. The Universal Destination of Goods

§§ 65–67

In addition to the earth’s created goods — water, air and natural sources — Leo extends the principle to patents, algorithms, platforms, infrastructure, and data, warning against their concentration in a few hands who holds the power. Connected with solidarity, when lived out in its fullest sense.

Whose access does this open, and whose does it close?

4. Subsidiarity

§§ 68–72

This stems from dignity; every person has something to contribute to society and for it to promote a culture of shared responsibility. Higher levels exist to enable lower ones, never to supplant them. Role of the State and intermediate organizations.

At what level is this decision being made, and are the people it affects part of making it?

5. Solidarity

§§ 73–76

“... every human being is created in the image of God and is part of a network of relationships that bind him or her to others...” We are connected to the future. Solidarity is a firm and persevering determination, not a feeling — which is why it can be practiced daily; it is the act of the will. It is also a virtue: it requires a “firm and persevering determination” to strive for the common good, with particular attention to those most in need. Solidarity finds its source in the mystery of Christ and is nourished by the Eucharist. Solidarity emerges from communion in faith and the Sacraments: Baptism and Confirmation unite us in Christ, so that we may become one Body and one Spirit, one heart and one soul.

Whose future have I quietly decided is not bound up with mine?

6. Justice

§§ 77–81 · includes the Preferential Option for the Poor (§ 78)

Justice is what is due to a person. The way we approach the least among us is the measure of our relationship with God. Social justice is a concrete way of following Jesus and remaining faithful to the Gospel; it concerns not only the behavior of individuals, but also the way in which the structures of society are conceived and organized.

What does this do to the least?

7. Integral Human Development

§§ 82–85 · The integrating framework

Development that consumes for now without regard for the future is not development.

Does this develop the whole person — material, moral, cultural, spiritual, relational — or only one dimension of the person?

Note — “The Church... must make her voice heard... to promote communion... Social Doctrine becomes a theology of communion in history, a history in which the Word made flesh continues to be present through dialogue, memory and prophecy.” §§ 27

Social Doctrine is not merely a message addressed to society; it is also an examination of conscience for the Church — a home and school of communion that is always called to ensure that the principles outlined in this chapter are applied, especially within its own structures. §§ 86

“With the same faith as Mary, let us become ‘weavers of hope’ in our world, sharing who we are and what we have, so that the presence of Jesus may grow among us and his Kingdom take shape.” §§ 245