

Solidarity and Subsidiarity:

Reflecting Trinitarian Communion in Human Society

Jeffrey Shott

THEO 102

March 25, 2023

Introduction

To understand how a given subject should act, one must first discern the goal toward which said subject's actions are rightly ordered. This being the case, in beginning its treatment on the proper behavior of humans in society, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* identifies the true end of humans—both individually and collectively—as God, the Trinity, in whose image they are created (cf. *CCC*, 1877-1878). In order to aid the faithful in attaining their true end the *Catechism* proceeds to outline two ethical principles capable of guiding men to God: namely, solidarity and subsidiarity.

God is One

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deut 6:4). God is one. Humans, then, if they wish to seek God, must live as God—that is, as one. This is the principle of solidarity, which, as Pope Francis teaches, involves “thinking and acting in terms of community” (*Fratelli tutti*, 116). The *Catechism* likewise describes solidarity as the principle that flows from the reality of human brotherhood (cf. *CCC*, 1939). In short, the principle of solidarity can be understood as the Church's recognition of the fact that divine unity ought to be reflected in human society. Hence, the Church rightly reminds men that they must strive as one to fulfill their vocation to union with the one God, for human division is incompatible with divine unicity. According to the *Catechism*, the preeminent manner in which humanity may express its unity is by the sharing of goods, particularly spiritual goods (cf. *CCC*, 1940, 1942), the foremost of which is charity.

God is Love

“God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). The *Catechism* further elucidates this most profound of statements by noting that the essence of God is based in the “eternal exchange of love” that takes place between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (*CCC*, 221). This is to say that the oneness of God is a oneness of *Persons*. For humans to truly reflect the image of God, they must do so not as an amorphous collective but as *persons in communion*. Hence, the Church articulates the principle of subsidiarity as the ethical norm which states that higher orders of society should not unduly interfere with the activities of lower orders of society (*CCC*, 1883). The national government should not unjustly interfere with the prerogatives of the local government, nor the bishop of those of the parish, nor the family of those of the individual. Put another way, individuals should not be lost in families, nor parishes in dioceses, nor towns in nations—just as the neither the Father, nor the Son, nor the Spirit, are lost in God.

Conclusion

Human society is rightly ordered only when it seeks union with the Triune God, the God whose *one* essence is the love between *Persons*. Thus, if they wish to obtain union with God, humans must reflect His image in their societies. Having been entrusted with the task of guiding souls to God, the Church in her wisdom encourages men to exercise solidarity and subsidiarity in the hope that humanity may one day rest as persons in communion with the divine communion of *Persons*.

Bibliography

Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020.

Pope Francis. *Fratelli tutti*. Vatican Website. October 3, 2020. Accessed March 25, 2023. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version | Second Catholic Edition. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006.