

COMMON GOOD

A Moral Category in the Social Thought of John Paul II

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1. Introduction

John Paul II, by his pontificate of twenty six years (1978-2005), has left behind an enormous legacy, with profound significance for the Church and for the world. He deserves much respect not just as a spiritual leader but as a moral and world leader as well. As a professional philosopher and a theologian, he raised the consciousness of all human beings of his age about the truth of human life and its destiny. As an ethicist, a universal pastor and a world leader, he was committed to the cause of the promotion of human rights and the common good. In an era of history dominated by totalitarian communism, individualistic capitalism, relativism and post-modernism, which posed a threat to human freedom, moral culture, religion and humanism, he constantly defended the dignity of human life.

The social thought of John Paul II “treats directly economic, political and cultural issues, actions and problems which militate the common good and welfare of people in society and which affect the dignity of human persons, families, communities and nations.”¹ It includes three social encyclicals: *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), *Centesimus Annus* (1991) and two on moral issues: *Veritatis Splendor* (1993); and *Evangelium Vitae* (1995). These encyclicals reveal his unique methodology, his vision and strategy to build the future society and the world on a firm spiritual and ethical foundation for a new and just ordering of the society. John Paul II, while examining an issue, brings different perspectives and integrates insights drawn from philosophy, theology and other disciplines to make his point with stress on the importance of a philosophical ethics that looks to the truth of the good.² At the same time

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¹C. D. Skok, “*Encyclicals, Social*” in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, M. Glazier, M. K. Hellwig, eds., Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994, 281.

²See A. Dulles, “The Metaphysical Realism of Pope John Paul II,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 48 (2008), 104.

he makes it clear that his social thought is not “an ideology,” nor “specific economic or political system” but rather “the accurate formulation of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence in society and in the international order, in the light of faith and of the Church’s Traditions” (SRS 41).³ Further he makes it clear that the social thought is neither a “third path” between Liberal Capitalism and Marxist Collectivism nor a possible alternative solution in contrast to them. But his social thought is a “set of principles for reflections, criteria for judging, and directives for action” (SRS 41-42), to analyze social realities, to make judgments to apply them in different historical, and cultural circumstances, (SRS 3, 8, 41) for the just resolution of the problems involved (CA 5).⁴

2. The Social Encyclicals and the Use of Philosophy

The social thought of John Paul II is philosophically rich as it contains and depends on the universally accepted values and principles arrived at with the right reason and natural insights. He confirms in his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, that philosophy is one of the noblest of human tasks, testifying to our ability to wonder, speculate and construct systems of thought (FR 3).⁵ And philosophy has an important role in the formation and development of the cultures. Thus the Church doctrines and the great masters of theology often adopt concepts and thought – forms, drawn from a particular philosophical tradition. As John Paul II points out, theology itself requires the support of philosophy that does not disavow the possibility of a knowledge that is objectively true (FR 82). Moreover, his social thought turns to philosophy, which looks to the truth of the good, to an ethics which is neither subjective nor utilitarian. Such an ethics implies and presupposes a philosophical anthropology and metaphysics of the good (FR 68, 98), to meet the challenge of reality and of human quest and questions.⁶ Without doubt, John Paul II, in his social thought proves himself as a professional philosopher-ethicist, who felt things deeply and responded instantly to persons and situations through his concrete experience and philosophical knowledge in depth.

³SRS=John Paul II, *Encyclical Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), AAS 80 (1988).

⁴CA=John Paul II, *Encyclical Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), AAS 83 (1991).

⁵FR=John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), AAS 91 (1999).

⁶Benedict XVI, *John Paul II: My Beloved Predecessor*, Milan: San Paolo, 2007, 10.

3. The Evolution of the Common Good in His Social Thought

The common good as the good of a community or a society is the good of the multitude, which is the good of all and each individual. It is shared and beneficial for all members of a given community or a society. The main concern of the common good is what constitutes the good life for human beings in their social life. The understanding of the common good in the social thought of John Paul II evolves from his understanding of relationship between the human person and a community or a society. He conceives human person as a subjective entity;⁷ being bestowed with intellect and will, he is master of his own destiny (VS 39).⁸ And human person is ordered to his ultimate end by his free and deliberate human acts (VS 72). Thus a human person fulfils himself by his morally good actions in concrete situations (VS 59). At the same time, human person is a social being by his nature and intrinsically ordained to interpersonal relationship with others (LE 3, 8).⁹ Therefore a person realises himself in relation with others by seeking the good of others through interpersonal communion of participation and solidarity (LE 8). And it is out of love for one’s good and of others persons come together in groups and communities (SRS 15, 28). This life in community of subjective beings creates goods for all to “find oneself” and makes a sincere gift “for others” (LE 14) by loving relationship among the members of a community, thus making every community a community of communion. Such communion among the members of a community enables each and every one to recognise others as brothers and sisters and to acknowledge the responsibility for the good of one and all through solidarity (SRS 8). Solidarity thus raises the level of interpersonal relationship from simple existence “with others” to existence “for others,”¹⁰ and energises all to contribute for the well-being of all with the vision of equality of all in dignity and rights and commit oneself for the achievement of justice, peace and freedom of all. The goal is to construct a society based on the “civilization of love” (CA 10), expressed

⁷John Paul II, *Address at Rome University for the Inauguration of the 10th Academic Year* (31 January 2002), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XXV (2002), 1:146.

⁸VS=John Paul II, *Encyclical Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), AAS 85 (1993).

⁹LE=John Paul II, *Encyclical Laborem Exercens* (14 September 1981), AAS 73 (1981).

¹⁰John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization* (5 October 1995), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XVIII (1995), 2:741.

in reciprocal respect for the human dignity and human rights of each and all by acknowledging God in every person and every person in God in a community (SRS 40; CA 10, 47). And this ultimately leads each and all members of a community to a loving relationship with God and with one another, which constitutes the highest good of humanity (VS 9, 79).

4. Common Good and Interpersonal Human Relationships

John Paul II, in the social thought situates common good in the context of demands of understanding the human person and his dignity and presents it as the order of interpersonal and interdependent human relationships in a community or society; “a system determining relationships in the contemporary world, in its economic, cultural, political and religious elements, and accepted as a moral category” (SRS 38). According to him, the common good is a question of “individual’s relationship with self, with neighbour, with even the remotest human communities, and with nature itself” (SRS 38). He calls it, “the full development of the whole individual and of all people” and explains the human development as progress of individual’s relationship to self in terms of “conversion;” a sense of “change of behaviour” or “mentality” or “mode of existence” (SRS 38). This conversion entails a relationship to God and to one’s neighbour, either as an individual or a community. He calls this conversion as the process of overcoming the moral obstacles with the positive moral values of growing awareness of interdependence among individuals and nations. Thus in the context of human relations of interdependence the common good becomes a moral category of determining the relationships in a society in all its economic, cultural, political and religious elements (SRS 38).

The common good as a moral category of determining the human relations signifies the expression of the very social nature of human person and thus the common good is “sociability” itself. John Paul II explains that the human persons are not isolated individuals; they require the co-operation of others in organising, planning and working towards a common goal. And collaboration with others makes possible for more extensive working communities (CA 32). There exists something which is due to man by reason of his dignity (CA 34), that is, building up a more decent life through being united and thus enhancing every individual’s dignity and creativity (CA 29). This process, he calls as the authentic development whereby human person by virtue of his own reason and exercise of his own freedom exercises the right and duty to seek God and serve his neighbours (CA 29). Thus the common good as a moral category

of interpersonal and social relations signifies that the common good consists in the ethical quality of interpersonal relations that is truly worthy of their dignity.¹¹ Therefore the realization of the common good depends on the very quality of the interpersonal relations and their preference of ethical values such as solidarity, friendship, love and so on.

John Paul II explains it further by saying, “The common good, by its very nature, both unites individual persons and ensures the true good of each” (LFGS 10).¹² Therefore the common good is not alien to the individuals but concerns greater good of the individuals and yet fully common. And the common good unites individuals in a relationship of communion, by which human life truly becomes a “sincere gift” to the other. John Paul II finds that in this “sincere gift of the self,” human beings find their self-realization. He writes: “[Man] cannot find himself except through a sincere self-gift of self” (LFGS, 11). He asserts that love expressed as “the self-gift” and acceptance of another is the richness of a person” (EV 23).¹³ And human persons become a gift to others only in the expression of love and love finds its fulfilment through the sincere gift of the self (LFGS 11). And at the social level it becomes “a moral and social attitude, a “virtue” which is solidarity” (SRS 38).

5. Common Good as Solidarity

John Paul II in his social encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* directly links the concept of “solidarity” to the concept of the common good, saying, solidarity is “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are responsible for all” (SRS 38). It signifies, the “readiness to lose oneself” for the sake of the other. He describes solidarity as a moral virtue determining relationships in the contemporary world in its economic, cultural, political and religious elements. As a moral virtue, it is not a mere “feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people. But on the contrary, “it is firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. That is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are responsible

¹¹P. Calotti, *La progression intensive della categoria di bene comune*, in P. Carloti, G. Gestori, et al., *Alla Ricerca del bene comune: Prospettive teoretiche e implicazioni pedagogiche per una nuova solidarietà*, LAS, Roma 2008, 120-121.

¹²John Paul II, *Letter to the Families Gratissimam Sane* (2 February 1994), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XVIII (1991).

¹³EV=John Paul II, *Encyclical Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), AAS 87 (1995).

for all” (SRS 38). It is also a social virtue since it places itself in the sphere of social justice. He also clearly defines solidarity as an “ethical value,”¹⁴ because it involves an affirmation of value about humanity and as a virtue directed par excellence to the common good, and is found in a “commitment to the good of one’s neighbour with the readiness to serve him or her instead of oppressing him or her for one’s own advantage” (SRS 38) but treating others as equals to oneself.

Solidarity as the commitment towards one’s neighbour as equals to oneself, translates individual interests into the willingness to give oneself for the good of one’s neighbour, beyond any individual or particular interest. He writes, “Solidarity helps us to see “other” as our “neighbour,” a “helper,” to be made a sharer, a “part within ourselves,” in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God” (SRS 39). In a sense, solidarity means that the powerful are called to serve and empower the poor, because valuing solidarity inevitably leads one “to embrace the option for the poor and commit oneself to justice and therefore to take up the cause of the poor in their struggle for justice.”¹⁵

Solidarity is a virtue of communities as well as of individuals, because through the efforts to establish a common understanding and shared earthly goods, solidarity becomes the means for the development of all. If some are left out of development or even opt out of it, solidarity vanishes and true development cannot take place (SRS 17). Solidarity is not just a question of giving one’s surplus to those in need but a change within oneself and in the structures:

... helping entire peoples presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development. For this to happen, it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of lifestyles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies (CA 58). Therefore, solidarity is the obligation to work unceasingly to change hearts, helping all people to see every human being as a child of God, a brother or a sister, and a member of one’s own human family (SRS 40).

¹⁴John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1987 World Day of Peace* (8 December 1986), AAS 79 (1987) 52.

¹⁵D. Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching*, Orbis, New York, 1992, 2.

“Solidarity is in fact a choice of life,”¹⁶ and a true and effective “culture of giving” on the basis of a continuous “exchange of gifts,”¹⁷ which makes every person and country ready to share the needs of others. According to him solidarity is an essential element of development on the personal, communal, national and international levels. Solidarity is a path to peace created by transforming mutual distrust into collaboration (SRS 39). The fruit of solidarity is peace and it broadens the narrow vision of peace as the mere absence of war. Solidarity in a particular way is the intrinsic social nature of the human person, which consists in the equality of all, in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity based on the awareness of the bond of interdependence between individuals and peoples, which is found in every level (LE 14-15). John Paul II argues that the principle of solidarity is an instrument for building up “the civilization of love” for which humanity yearns (SRS 40). Such a process towards “the civilization of love” has its beginning and fulfilment while solidarity is lived in family, in the community and in the world in an openness to the entire human family.¹⁸

According to John Paul II, the spirit of solidarity is a spirit that is open to dialogue. It finds its roots in truth and depends on truth to develop it.¹⁹ This enables us to approach all cultures, all religions, all ideological concepts and all peoples. It makes it possible for individuals and groups to work together to strive to foster everlasting unity, charity and communion between individuals for further fellowship among all. Thus it seeks to build up rather than destroy, to unite rather than to divide. It replaces “ignorance and prejudice by tolerance and understanding, indifference and class struggle into brotherhood and committed service.”²⁰ It creates bonds between people who recognize the other’s value as a person and presumes the participation of all (CA 22). As a virtue it builds bridges of understanding and helps to realize the inherent aspiration to help one’s neighbours who are in need. Solidarity is capable of raising the level of

¹⁶John Paul II, *Message for the World Food Day* (16 October 1997), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XX (1997), 2:575.

¹⁷John Paul II, *Address on the Fiftieth Anniversary of FAO* (23 October 1995), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XVIII (1995), 2:931.

¹⁸John Paul II, *Address to Catholic Relief Services* (8 October 1995), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XVIII (1995), 2:794.

¹⁹John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1987 World Day of Peace*, 49.

²⁰John Paul II, *Homily at the Mass in Indira Gandhi Stadium, New Delhi* (2 February 1986), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IX (1986), 1:273.

relations between the nations from the “organizational” to a more “organic” level, from simple “existence with” others to “existence for” others,²¹ in fruitful exchange of gifts, primarily for the good of the weaker nations and of grater good for everyone. This is precisely the act of proper to solidarity among nations (SRS 39), which ultimately results in the universal common good.

6. Common Good and the Promotion of Human Rights and Dignity

The common good is not merely the sum of individual goods or interests nor welfare of the particular members of any society because the common good cannot to be identified with the particular goods and values of particular community.²² It is indivisible and at the same time internal and external to the human person. The common good belongs to everyone and to each person: “the more “common” the good, the more properly one’s own, it will also be mine-yours-ours” (LFGS 10). John Paul II distinctively defines the common good in the *Centissimus Annus* as:

The common good is not simply the sum total of particular interest; rather it involves an assessment and integration of those interest on the basis of a balanced hierarchy of values; ultimately, it demands a correct understanding of the dignity and rights of the person (CA 47).

In this context, the common good is neither the sum of goods of each individual nor the greatest good of the greatest number. It is not the numbers or generality in the quantitative sense or purely materialistic good alone that would determine the common good but the existence of a hierarchy of values, in so far as some goods are more fundamental to the human person than others. And John Paul II argues that the progress of humanity must not only be measured by the progress of science and technology, but chiefly by “the primacy given to spiritual values and by the progress of moral life.”²³ It implies that the dignity of human persons “requires the primordial moral requirement of loving and respecting the person as an end and never as a mere means” (VS 48).

The full attainment of the common good requires a complementary action that defends and promotes human rights. According to him, no authentic progress is possible without respect for natural and fundamental

²¹John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly*, 155.

²²M. Toso, *Il bene comue oggi*, in M. Toso & G. Quinzi, *I Cattolici e il bene comune: Quale formazione?* Roma: LAS, 2007, 21.

²³John Paul II, *Address to the Thirty fourth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization* (2 October 1979), AAS 71 (1979), 1147.

rights (CA 29). He holds that “promotion of human rights is the necessary condition and sure guarantee of the development of the whole individual and of all peoples” (SRS 44). For, the good of every individual person, every human community and of the political community itself is found on recognition of fundamental rights.²⁴ Therefore, the common good is served best when the dignity and the rights of the individual are protected in a community or society.

John Paul II always defended human person, the human dignity and human rights. For him, it is self-evident that the human person is endowed with universal, inviolable and inalienable rights,²⁵ which directly and simultaneously flow from his very nature, for “human beings enjoy [them] by the very fact of their humanity.”²⁶ They are universal and global by the fact that they are rooted in the nature of the person and they “reflect the objective and inviolable demands of a universal moral law.”²⁷ John Paul II places, in the first place, “the right to life” among the inviolable rights, because human life is sacred.²⁸ The inviolability of right to life calls for respect for human dignity, because “the dignity of human person is a transcendent value,”²⁹ being created in the “image of God” and oriented towards Him. Thus the right to life constituted of a positive choice for life, which ensures the promotion of human dignity in every situation and circumstance.³⁰

He accords the second place, among the inviolable human rights, to the “right to religious freedom” (RH 17)³¹ of both individuals and communities and calls it as the “heart of human rights”³² and the “foundation stone of the structure of human rights and the foundation of

²⁴John Paul II, *Address to Bengt O. Johansen, Ambassador of Norway to the Holy See* (18 December 1997), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XX (1997), 2:1049.

²⁵John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace* (8 December 1998), AAS 91 (1999), 378.

²⁶John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly*, 731.

²⁷John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly*, 732.

²⁸John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 380.

²⁹John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 378.

³⁰John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 380.

³¹RH=John Paul II, *Encyclical Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), AAS 71 (1979); See also John Paul II, *Address to the Thirty fourth General*, 1157; *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly*, 2:737; and *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 381.

³²John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 381.

every truly free society.”³³ Accordingly he states: “Religion expresses the deepest aspiration of the human person, shapes people’s vision of the world and affects their relationship with others: basically it offers the answer to the question of the true meaning, both personal and communal.”³⁴ “Religious freedom” indicates the freedom to seek the truth, especially the religious truth and to live it.³⁵ It also involves the freedom of conscience,³⁶ the right to manifest personal belief in private and public, the right to gather for worship and even the right to change the religion.³⁷

Apart from inviolable rights, John Paul II also acknowledges the traditional categories of the human rights as civil and political rights on the one hand and economic, social and cultural rights on the other.³⁸ And he considers that they are closely connected because they are the “expression of different dimensions of a single subject, the human person.”³⁹ For they stem from the inherent dignity and worth of human person,⁴⁰ and “promotion of every category of human rights is the true guarantee of full respect for each individual right.”⁴¹ Accordingly, he lists those universally recognised human rights such as:

The right to life, liberty and security of person, the right to food, clothing, housing, sufficient health care, rest and leisure, the right to freedom of expression, education and culture, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to manifest one’s religion either individually or in community, in public or in private, the right to chose a state of life, to found a family and to enjoy all conditions of necessary for family life, the right to property and work, to adequate working conditions and a just wage, the right of assembly and association, the right to political participation and the right to participate in free choice of political system of the people to which one belongs.⁴²

They are also the rights of individuals and communities of peoples, for, they “tell us something important about the actual life of every individual

³³ John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly*, 737.

³⁴ John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 381.

³⁵ John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly*, 739.

³⁶ John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly*, 737.

³⁷ John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 380.

³⁸ John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 379.

³⁹ John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 379.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 379.

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 379.

⁴² John Paul II, *Address to the Thirty fourth General Assembly*, 1152-1153.

and of every social group,”⁴³ both spiritual and material realities. Thus the common good consists in recognition and respect for these rights because they are common to all and they concern the necessary conditions for the satisfaction of basic needs and self-fulfilment and the full dimension of human life.⁴⁴ In short, John Paul II emphasizes that individual persons have the right to those conditions and things to realize their dignity as human beings. Thus he insists on both the dignity of the human person and the essential social nature of the human dignity being recognized and respected. He makes it clear that the common good of the whole society dwells in man, in his dignity and rights; for “man is a common good: a common good of the family and of humanity, of individual groups and of different communities (LFGS 11). Recognition, respect and promotion of human dignity and rights promote the good of the individual and thus serve the common good. The good of each individual and of all is contained in promotion of the dignity and rights of each and of all. For, human rights are of highest importance in social life, both at the national and international levels – “all human beings in every nation and country should enjoy effectively their full rights under any political regime or system.”⁴⁵

7. Common Good and Respect for Human Dignity and Rights

The aim of John Paul II’s definition of the common good is the “defence of the human person and the safeguarding of human rights and human dignity” (CA 47) because the human person and his preferences ought to be “the origin, the subject and the purpose of all social institutions” (GS 25).⁴⁶ The dignity of the human person springs from his nature being created by God “for Himself.” The respect for the dignity of every human person and respect for inviolable and inalienable human rights are fundamental for any society (EV 59, 69). John Paul II resists the contemporary temptation to relegate the transcendental human dignity to the private sphere by sidelining the spiritual and the transcendent human dignity from public life, by defining the human person in merely biological or sociological terms.⁴⁷

⁴³John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General*, 732.

⁴⁴John Paul II, *Address to the Thirty fourth General Assembly*, 1153.

⁴⁵John Paul II, *Address to the Thirty fourth General*, 1157.

⁴⁶GS=Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudem et Spes* (7 December 1965).

⁴⁷John Paul II, *Address to Bengt O. Johansen, Ambassador of Norway to the Holy See* (18 December 1997), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XX (1997), 2:1049.

Human person received an incomparable and inalienable dignity and rights from God and strives to recognize the same in everyone and in every situation (RH 14). Since man is created in the image of God, there is a reflection of God, the creator, the definitive goal and fulfilment of every person in everyone. “The person, including the body, is completely entrusted to himself, and it is in the unity of body and reason that the person is subject of his own moral acts” (VS 48). It should be understood that every person is endowed with responsibility and freedom “as a personal being and also as a community and social being” (RH 14). Thus human persons have “the right to share in the building of society” (SRS 15), in creating a social order worthy of his dignity and rights. And society itself arises out of the dignity of the human person and reaches beyond society. “A single human soul is worth more than the whole universe of material goods. There is nothing higher than immortal soul, save God. With respect to the eternal destiny of the soul, society exists for each person and is subordinate to it.”⁴⁸ Pope reminds that persons even with disabilities are fully human subjects, with dignity, rights and duties; they affirm more clearly the dignity and greatness of man (LE 22). This entails the requirement that every person be respected of their equal dignity and rights by political and social institutions because human dignity and human rights are rooted in the sanctity and quality of human life.

The protection of human dignity and rights is one of the imperative requirements of the common good. The society should acknowledge that it is at the service of its members and their natural aspiration to find fulfilment as individuals and social beings. The common good of a society is brought to full realization only when all citizens are sure of their rights (RH 17). But when they are ignored or violated, the common good vanishes or diminishes by the pursuit of the individual’s interests.⁴⁹ Justice and peace for all comes from respect for the human dignity and rights of each individual member of a society. A just society can become a reality only when it is based on the respect of the transcendent dignity of the human person as its end. Human person therefore cannot be used as a means to be manipulated by coercion or denial of human rights, for carrying out economic, social or political projects based on self interests. The recognition of human dignity and rights can only make the common and personal growth of everyone possible in every community and whole of humanity.

⁴⁸J. Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre-Dame-Indiana, 1946, 61.

⁴⁹John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 378.

John Paul II appreciates the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights, adopted by United Nations as “a true milestone on the path of humanity’s moral progress,”⁵⁰ and “one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time.”⁵¹ They are universal, inviolable, and inalienable without exception of time, place or subject because they are inherent in the human person and in human dignity.⁵² They correspond to the fulfilment of the essential needs of the person in the material and spiritual spheres and to every stage of life and to every political, social, economic and cultural situation, directed towards the good of the person and society.⁵³ The declaration draws attention to a number of essential features of human rights, emphasizing the recognition of the innate dignity of all members of the human family as well as the equality and inalienability of human rights as the foundation of liberty, justice and peace. “Together they form a single whole, directed unambiguously towards the promotion of the good of both the person and society.”⁵⁴ Such recognition of human rights should also establish a “culture of human rights:” “Only when a culture of human rights which respects different traditions becomes an integral part of humanity’s moral patrimony shall be able to look to the future with serene confidence.”⁵⁵

John Paul II also regards that the promotion of the human rights includes the right of peoples and nations (SRS 33, CA 21), which rests on the equal respect to the States, for each one’s right to self-determination and for their free cooperation in view of the higher common good of humanity.⁵⁶ The rights of the nations are nothing but human rights fostered at the specific level of community life. Therefore the common good of a nation consists in its fundamental right to existence, to its own language, and culture, through which people express and promote its fundamental spiritual sovereignty to shape its life according to its own traditions to build its future by providing an appropriate education for the younger generation.⁵⁷

⁵⁰John Paul II, *Address to the Thirty fourth General Assembly*, 1147- 1148.

⁵¹John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly*, 732.

⁵²John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 379.

⁵³John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 379.

⁵⁴John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 379.

⁵⁵John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the 1999 World Day of Peace*, 385.

⁵⁶John Paul II, *Letter on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Outbreak of the Second World War* (4 September 1989), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XII (1989), 2:384.

⁵⁷John Paul II, *Address to the Fiftieth General Assembly*, 736.

8. Conclusion

From the above discussion it is clear that John Paul II presents a clear vision of the concept of the common good and arguments in favour of defining it as a moral category of determining interpersonal and interdependent human relations for solidarity, upholding human dignity and human rights. It is a constructive approach to foster the material, moral and spiritual well-being of humanity in a holistic manner. In his approach much focus has been given to the principles, virtues and values appropriate to assume the common good. His approach provides a virtue and principle-based approach to personal and social well-being. Thus it is a normative approach to the common good. Since there are also other approaches to the common good,⁵⁸ we observe certain missing elements in his approach to the common good.

Given the complexity of the concept of the common good and in the context of an acute awareness of the growing diversity of vision of good life by peoples around the world, some authors have expressed epistemological scepticism, arguing that a shared or common vision of the common good is impossible.⁵⁹ And in the recent times the developments of social choice and collective choice approaches to the human community and social arrangements brought forward the contract paradigm as the dominant against the covenantal paradigm.⁶⁰ His approach follows

⁵⁸C. Pagliariccio provides different approaches to define the common good such as: Normative, descriptive, Strong normative and weak descriptive, weak normative and strong descriptive, etc. Thus he argues that defining the concept of the common good has many possibilities. See C. Pagliariccio, “*Sognare, apprezzare e condividere il bene*”. *Una visione psicoeducativa per la promozione del bene comune*, in P. Carlotti-G. Quinzi et al., *Alla ricerca del bene comune: Prospettive teoretiche e implicazioni pedagogiche per una nuova solidarietà*, LAS, Roma 2008, 197-231.

⁵⁹J. Rawls has proposed that in the context of present diversity of the world, a shared vision of the good is impossible. While J. Shklar argues that any pursuit of comprehensive vision of the good will be at the expenses of those who lack the power to define or enforce their own definition of the highest good. See J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University, New York 1996; J. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1984.

⁶⁰A. Cortina provides the categories of two paradigms: contract and covenantal, and interprets that contract paradigm the human relations are understood to be artificially created on the basis of free, calculating reasons of individuals; in contrast, a covenantal paradigm sees humans a social by nature. She argues those both are essential and are complementary. See A. Cortina, *Covenant and Contract: Politics and Religion*, Peeters, Leuven, 2003.

covenantal paradigm. A balanced approach between these two paradigms would be more compatible to solve the complexity of the concept.

Secondly, in the formation of the concept of the common good itself, individual participation is fundamentally important. The recognition of the voices of the people is one of the foundational resources and approaches in social ethics in the contemporary political theories.⁶¹ J. Merkle argues, peoples’ participation in the truth of values such as equality, respect, and dignity will provide ethical guidance in social life. In John Paul II’s approach of the formation of universal principles and values, particular virtues should also see its role in terms of conscious, public practice of specific virtues among its members.⁶² The principles and values describing the common good do not pertain to a person’s character nor is proper attention given to provide a way to move toward the concrete realization within real persons for them to embody them. John Paul II, instead of examining social systems, whether social systems measure up to the standards of the common good, the focus should have been to clarify the proper organizational shape of the society insisting on the participation within the dialogue about the common good.

Thirdly, John Paul II argues mainly for the principle, value and virtue of solidarity as commitment towards the common good. But the simultaneous practice of solidarity needs along other virtues as to transform personal life as well as social structures. C. P. Vogt argues, along with solidarity, many other virtues like compassion and hospitality are important for social concern.⁶³ Likewise, M. Nussbaum insists on the cultivation of compassion first towards those near us then moving forward towards others instead of care for everyone at once.⁶⁴ Therefore solidarity alone in isolation from other virtues cannot achieve the common good. Though John Paul II does not treat solidarity as an isolated virtue or value,

⁶¹M. Elsbernd argues that peoples’ voices is the most crucial of foundational resources and approaches of social ethics and it is not enough that the voices are heard but also should be accepted, published and promoted including in describing the common good. See M. Elsbernd, “Social Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 66 (2005), 137-158.

⁶²See J. Merkle, *From the Heart of the Church: The Catholic Social Tradition*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002, 242.

⁶³See C. P. Vogt, “Fostering a Catholic Commitment to the Common Good: An Approach Rooted in Virtue Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007), 394-417.

⁶⁴M. Nussbaum, “Can Patriotism Be Compassionate?” *Nation* 273, 20 (17 December 2001), 11-14.

he provides no explanation on cultivating it in individual formation. There should be balance between the universal concern and individual formation.

Fourthly, John Paul II's definition of the common good links it to the human rights. With regard to his concern for the human rights much importance is given for the grounding of the human rights and defence of the inviolable rights. The argument for the specific means and ways of obtaining them is ignored. Grounding of the human rights has to be supplemented with specific means of obtaining them. Moreover, John Paul II relies on Universal Bill of Rights, legislation and the policies of political powers to safeguard and the promote them. Thus the participation by the people in formation and obtaining the rights remains vague.

The common good is neither just as a question of material well-being or economically well off or of having more social and economic freedoms. Above all, it is human development; of better interpersonal human relationships, naturally good, friendly and loving in their interpersonal encounters. It is the quality of life worthy of human dignity expressed in mutual respect for freedom and rights. It is a question of moral option for principles, values and virtues in developing the structures of society and thus making all the conditions suitable for self-fulfilment as individuals and as communities. It is based on the truth of human person and his destiny. In the context of the globalised world, increasing secularization and rising global economic crisis, the Pope recommends an ethical vision that places priority on the common good, through solidarity for the respect for human dignity and rights. It demands, a constant and continuous conversion of making oneself a good and responsible neighbour to each other to build up better interpersonal and interdependent human relationships. It signifies that we rise above the individualism and commit ourselves to the common good by constructing a culture of values, virtues, of responsibility and fraternity to make our society a better place for ourselves and for all.