



Introduction: The Context and Importance of the Topic in Catholic Theology

The principle of subsidiarity is one of the foundational pillars of the Catholic Church's social doctrine. It is often associated with social and political organization, but at its core, it is a deeply theological principle that reflects a Christian vision of the human person, personal dignity, and the common good. Subsidiarity means that decisions should be made at the level closest to the individual or community, thus ensuring that people have the capacity and right to be protagonists in their own lives without being overwhelmed by higher structures.

This principle, which combines justice and charity, is not just about politics or economics but also has profound implications for the spiritual life of Christians. By respecting people's ability to act and decide for themselves, subsidiarity reinforces human freedom, which is a gift from God, and fosters each individual's responsibility within the community. Understanding and applying the principle of subsidiarity invites us to live an active, engaged faith, recognizing both our own dignity and that of others.

Historical and Biblical Context: The Origins of the Principle of Subsidiarity in Scripture

The principle of subsidiarity is neither a recent concept nor solely philosophical. Its roots can be traced back to Sacred Scripture and the early Christian tradition. While the term itself does not appear explicitly in the Bible, the spirit of the principle is present in various biblical teachings about individual responsibility, solidarity, and the organization of communal life.

One of the most cited passages in relation to the principle of subsidiarity is the story of Jethro's counsel to Moses in the book of Exodus (18:13-26). In this episode, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, observes that Moses is overwhelmed by the responsibility of judging all the disputes of the people of Israel by himself. Jethro advises him to delegate this task to lesser leaders, who will handle smaller disputes, leaving Moses to deal only with the more difficult cases. This story not only illustrates the value of delegating responsibility but also the idea that problems and decisions should be resolved at the level most appropriate and closest to the people involved.

In the New Testament, we also find Jesus' constant call for mutual responsibility and service within the community of believers. Jesus invites His followers to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Mt 5:13-16), which implies that each person has a unique and particular mission within the Body of Christ. This mission cannot simply be assumed or centralized by a higher authority but must be lived personally and communally.



This biblical approach shows us that subsidiarity not only involves social justice but is also a deep invitation to respect the freedom and active role of each individual within the community. It is a call to live responsibly and engaged, being aware of our capabilities and the impact our decisions have on others.

Theological Relevance: The Spiritual Meaning of the Principle of Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity holds profound meaning within Catholic theology, as it is based on the dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27). In this sense, subsidiarity promotes a Christian vision of freedom: a freedom that is neither individualistic nor selfish but is oriented toward the common good and the building of a more just and fraternal society.

Theologically, the principle of subsidiarity is closely linked with the concept of charity and social justice. The Church teaches that charity cannot be authentic if justice is not also sought, and subsidiarity is a way to ensure that social structures respect the dignity of persons, allowing them to develop fully. As Pope Pius XI explained in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), subsidiarity means that “it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil to transfer to the larger and higher collectivity functions which can be performed and provided for by lesser and subordinate bodies.”

This principle reflects the Church’s confidence in people’s and communities’ ability to govern themselves and contribute to the common good in a way that respects their dignity and freedom. It is not about selfish independence but rather a recognition that each person has a role to play in building society and communal life, under the guidance of God’s justice and love.

Moreover, subsidiarity is deeply intertwined with the concept of solidarity, another key principle of Catholic social teaching. While subsidiarity ensures that decisions are made as close as possible to those affected, solidarity reminds us that we are called to care for one another, especially the most vulnerable. Both principles, when lived together, promote a vision of society based on shared responsibility and justice.

Practical Applications: How to Integrate Subsidiarity into Daily Life

The principle of subsidiarity is not just a theoretical or political abstraction; it has practical applications in the everyday lives of Christians. Below, we explore how this principle can be integrated into family, work, and community life:



1. **In the Family:** Subsidiarity begins in the nucleus of society: the family. Parents are the primary educators of their children, and the Church teaches that civil authorities should respect and support this fundamental mission without unnecessary interference. Applying subsidiarity in the family means allowing each member to participate in decision-making according to their ability, fostering personal responsibility. This can be manifested in simple things like involving children in household chores or important family decisions so that they learn to take responsibility and contribute to the common good.
2. **In the Workplace:** In the workplace, subsidiarity promotes a leadership style that delegates tasks and trusts in the abilities of each worker. Managers and leaders should avoid centralizing all decisions, recognizing that those closest to the problems often have the best solutions. Fostering the active participation of employees and respecting their autonomy creates an environment of trust and cooperation, reflecting Christian values of respect and justice.
3. **In the Community:** At the community level, the principle of subsidiarity translates into active participation in local life. Decisions that affect a community should be made by those who live in it, rather than being imposed by distant authorities. In the Church, this means that parishes and local organizations should have the necessary autonomy to serve their communities in the most effective way, supported by broader diocesan and ecclesial structures.
4. **In Politics and Society:** In the social and political sphere, subsidiarity invites us to promote structures that respect the autonomy of individuals and communities without creating unnecessary dependence on the state or higher organizations. This does not mean that larger structures have no role but that their intervention should be subsidiary, meaning only when necessary to ensure the well-being of all. In this sense, the principle of subsidiarity promotes a more just and equitable society, where people have an active role in building the common good.

Contemporary Reflection: Subsidiarity in the Modern World

In the current context, marked by globalization, ecological crisis, and social tensions, the principle of subsidiarity takes on special relevance. The modern world, with its focus on efficiency and centralization, risks dehumanizing individuals, reducing them to numbers in a bureaucratic structure or mere consumers in a market economy.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, reminds us that subsidiarity is key to addressing contemporary challenges, especially concerning care for our common home. Rather than imposing solutions from above, it is crucial that local communities have the power and resources to manage their own ecological, social, and economic problems. This is a direct



application of the principle of subsidiarity in the realm of integral ecology.

In a world where many decisions are made far from those affected by them, subsidiarity reminds us that power should serve people, not the other way around. In political, economic, and social life, it is crucial to promote structures that respect the dignity and agency of each person, especially the most vulnerable.

Conclusion: Living Subsidiarity as a Path of Faith

The principle of subsidiarity is far more than just a theory; it is a practical and spiritual guide that invites us to live lives of justice, responsibility, and solidarity. By recognizing the dignity of every person and their ability to contribute to the common good, subsidiarity helps us build a more just and fraternal society.

As Christians, we are called to live this principle in our personal relationships and in the social structures we are part of. In the home, subsidiarity encourages us to trust in each member's ability to take responsibility. In the workplace, it promotes delegation, respect, and mutual cooperation. In community and political life, it invites us to act with a sense of justice, always seeking to ensure that decisions and actions respect people's dignity and allow them to grow as individuals and communities.

Applying this principle in our daily lives means recognizing that each person has a unique and valuable role to play and that social structures, from the family to the state, must respect that freedom and capacity. In this sense, the principle of subsidiarity becomes a path to holiness, where charity and justice meet to form a true social fabric based on Christ's love.

As we reflect on the challenges of the modern world, let us remember that subsidiarity is an antidote to excessive centralization and dehumanization. It invites us to promote a society where everyone can flourish according to their vocation, contributing to the common good and honoring God's divine plan for humanity.

Ultimately, the principle of subsidiarity not only invites us to organize our social life better but also to live in communion with others, respecting the freedom God has given us and serving the most vulnerable with love and justice. May this principle be a light that guides our daily decisions and actions and helps us build a world closer to the Kingdom of God. Amen!