We live in an age of profound economic, cultural, and technological transformation. The automation of labor, artificial intelligence, job insecurity, the rising cost of living, and economic uncertainty have led many people to ask whether the current economic model can continue to sustain itself as we know it. In the midst of this debate, a proposal has re-emerged that generates enthusiasm in some and concern in others: Universal Basic Income (UBI).

For some, UBI represents an act of social justice and a tool to protect human dignity in the face of an increasingly dehumanized economic system. For others, it represents a moral and cultural risk: the danger of encouraging dependency, weakening the meaning of work, and eroding personal and family responsibility.

But what can a Catholic say about this issue? How should this question be analyzed in light of the Social Doctrine of the Church? Is a universal basic income compatible with Christian principles? Does it truly help human dignity, or does it end up weakening social participation, effort, and the value of work?

The issue cannot be answered with political slogans or simplistic formulas. It requires serious theological, moral, and pastoral reflection. The Church does not offer closed economic recipes, but it does provide permanent principles for discerning any political or economic system: the dignity of the human person, the common good, solidarity, the universal destination of goods, and especially the principle of subsidiarity.

What Is Universal Basic Income?

Universal Basic Income generally consists of a sum of money periodically given by the State to all citizens, regardless of their employment status, wealth, or income.

Its supporters argue that it:

- guarantees a minimum standard of living;
- reduces poverty;
- protects against economic crises;
- allows greater personal freedom;
- helps in contexts of automation and technological unemployment;
- reduces social exclusion.

Its critics argue that it:

- discourages work;
- increases dependence on the State;
- weakens individual responsibility;
- may destroy the culture of effort;
- encourages political paternalism;
- generates enormous economic costs.

From a Catholic perspective, the issue cannot simply be reduced to being “for” or “against” it. The real question is much deeper:

What vision of the human person lies behind this proposal?

Because every economic structure is always born from a particular anthropology. And the Social Doctrine of the Church constantly insists that social errors ultimately arise from errors about human nature.

Human Dignity as the Starting Point

The Church teaches that every person possesses an inviolable dignity because he or she was created in the image and likeness of God.

> *“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him.”*
> *(Genesis 1:27)*

This means that the value of a human being does not depend on economic productivity. A person is not worth more because he produces more money. The elderly, the disabled, the sick, the unemployed, or the poor possess exactly the same dignity as any successful businessman or professional.

Here we find an important first element: the Social Doctrine of the Church firmly rejects any

system that abandons people to absolute misery.

Indifference toward social suffering has never been compatible with the Gospel.

Christ Himself identified with the poor:

> *"For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink."*
> *(Matthew 25:35)*

Therefore, any truly Christian society must be concerned with guaranteeing minimum conditions for a dignified life.

The question, however, is how to do so correctly.

Work: Much More Than Earning Money

One of the most common mistakes in modern debate is thinking that work only serves to produce wealth or earn a salary. In the Christian vision, work possesses a profoundly spiritual dimension.

John Paul II, in the encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, taught that work participates in God's creative action.

Man was not created for absolute passivity, but to transform the world with intelligence, creativity, and responsibility.

> *"If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat."*
> *(2 Thessalonians 3:10)*

This verse is often quoted harshly or simplistically, but it contains an important teaching:

work is part of the ordinary human vocation.

The problem arises when a society ceases to value effort, responsibility, and contribution to the common good.

Here a legitimate concern emerges regarding certain formulations of Universal Basic Income: if it is presented as a right completely detached from any social responsibility, it could foster a culture of passivity.

The Church has always distinguished between:

- helping those in need;
- and promoting permanent dependency.

Authentic charity neither humiliates nor infantilizes. It seeks to elevate the person so that he may fully develop.

The Principle of Subsidiarity: Key to Understanding the Issue

One of the most important pillars of the Social Doctrine of the Church is the principle of subsidiarity.

What does it mean?

That higher structures should not absorb what smaller communities or individuals can accomplish themselves.

In other words:

- the family should not be unnecessarily replaced by the State;
- civil society should not be nullified;
- personal initiative must be protected;
- intermediary associations must be strengthened;
- central power should not become a machine that controls all social life.

This principle was especially developed by Pius XI in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*.

Subsidiarity seeks to avoid two extremes:

1. Savage Individualism

Which abandons the poor under the logic of “every man for himself.”

2. Collectivist Paternalism

Which turns the State into a substitute for family, community, and personal responsibility.

And here we enter the great debate surrounding Universal Basic Income.

Can Universal Basic Income Weaken Subsidiarity?

Yes, it can happen.

When all economic security depends exclusively on the State, there is a risk that:

- the family loses strength;
- community responsibility diminishes;
- local solidarity networks weaken;
- psychological and economic dependency increase;
- the citizen becomes completely dependent on political power.

History shows that excessively centralized systems tend to generate impersonal bureaucracies and forms of social control.

The Church has always distrusted models in which the State absorbs all social functions.

John Paul II warned about this in *Centesimus Annus*, criticizing the “welfare State” when it ends up nullifying human initiative.

Not because helping is bad, but because poorly designed assistance can slowly destroy human virtues.

The Culture of Effort and the Spiritual Crisis of the West

We live in a culture deeply marked by immediate consumerism and the constant search for comfort.

Happiness is often presented as the total absence of sacrifice.

But Christianity teaches exactly the opposite:

- maturity requires discipline;
- holiness requires effort;
- authentic love involves self-giving;
- human life contains a dimension of redemptive sacrifice.

Christ Himself said:

> *"If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."*
> *(Luke 9:23)*

A society that completely eliminates the idea of effort eventually weakens the moral character of its people.

For this reason, some Catholic critics of UBI fear that it could consolidate a mentality in which individuals expect to receive without contributing.

And this concern is not merely economic. It is spiritual.

Because the issue is not only "who pays," but what kind of human being is being formed.

But There Is Also an Opposite Danger: Idolizing Work

However, it would be a serious mistake to fall into the opposite extreme.

The Church also rejects a dehumanized capitalism in which a person is valued only for productivity.

Today there are people who work exhausting hours and still cannot live with dignity.

There are abandoned elderly people, families unable to afford housing, young people without opportunities, and exploited workers.

Automation and artificial intelligence could radically transform the labor market in the coming decades.

In light of this reality, some Catholics argue that guaranteeing a minimum standard of living could be compatible with human dignity and with the universal destination of goods.

Because the goods of creation were given by God for everyone.

Private property is legitimate, but not absolute.

The Universal Destination of Goods

The Social Doctrine of the Church teaches that God created the earth for the benefit of all humanity.

This does not mean abolishing private property, but it does mean remembering that all wealth has a social dimension.

The Catechism states:

> *"The right to private property… does not do away with the original gift of the earth to the whole of mankind."*

Therefore, when a society produces abundance while millions live in misery, a moral problem emerges.

The legitimate question becomes:

How can dignified conditions be guaranteed without destroying freedom and responsibility?

This is where Catholic reflection demands prudence.

Christian Prudence in the Face of Ideologies

The Church does not teach that there is a single mandatory economic system for all times.

There is no closed "Catholic economic model."

For this reason, two faithful Catholics may legitimately debate Universal Basic Income as long as they respect the fundamental principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

Discernment must avoid both:

- collectivist socialism;
- and radical individualistic liberalism.

The Church absolutizes neither the market nor the State.

The human person always remains central.

When Could Universal Economic Assistance Be Morally Acceptable?

From a theological and pastoral perspective, there may be contexts in which broad forms of assistance are legitimate:

- severe economic crises;
- massive technological unemployment;
- collapse of labor sectors;
- extreme structural poverty;
- real impossibility of accessing dignified work.

But even in those cases, assistance should:

- promote social reintegration;
- strengthen dignity;
- avoid permanent dependency;
- protect the family;
- encourage community participation;
- foster personal responsibility.

The goal should never be to create passive citizens, but persons capable of fully developing themselves.

The Real Modern Problem: The Loss of the Meaning of Man

Very often, the debate about UBI is framed only in economic terms.

But the root of the problem is spiritual and anthropological.

The West is undergoing a profound crisis regarding the meaning of work, family, sacrifice, and community.

Isolation, loneliness, declining birth rates, and the loss of human bonds show that the problem will not be solved simply by distributing money.

Man needs much more:

- meaning;
- belonging;
- mission;
- community;
- hope;
- transcendence.

Material poverty is serious, but spiritual poverty may be even worse.

A Pastoral Reflection for Our Time

As Christians, we must avoid cruelty disguised as meritocracy and also paternalism disguised as compassion.

Not every form of assistance dignifies.

But neither does every demand strengthen.

True Christian charity seeks the integral good of the person.

Sometimes this will mean economically supporting those who cannot move forward on their own. Other times it will mean accompanying, forming, and helping people recover responsibility and hope.

The Church constantly calls us to build a society where:

- no one is discarded;
- no one is reduced to a number;
- no one lives enslaved by poverty;
- but also where man does not lose the sense of his active and creative vocation.

Christ and the Poor: Beyond Politics

The Gospel cannot be reduced to an economic program.

Christ did not come simply to redistribute wealth, but to save the whole human person.

Yet He also did not ignore material suffering.

Concern for the poor forms an inseparable part of authentic Christianity.

The decisive issue is that every social policy must simultaneously respect:

- human dignity;
- freedom;
- responsibility;
- solidarity;
- subsidiarity;
- and the common good.

When one of these principles is absolutized at the expense of the others, imbalance appears.

Social Justice or an Incentive to Laziness?

The most honest Catholic answer is probably:

It depends on how it is proposed and on the vision of the human person that sustains it.

Economic assistance can:

- protect human dignity;
- prevent situations of misery;

- provide family stability;
- allow a more humane life.

But it can also:

- weaken the culture of effort;
- increase dependence on the State;
- erode personal responsibility;
- destroy subsidiarity;
- foster social isolation.

For this reason, the Social Doctrine of the Church insists so strongly on prudence, discernment, and balance.

Conclusion: Human Dignity Needs Bread… but Also Purpose

Universal Basic Income touches very deep questions about what it means to be human.

Are we merely consumers who need income?

Or are we persons called to love, create, serve, and actively participate in society?

Christianity teaches that man needs material nourishment, yes, but also mission, responsibility, and transcendence.

A truly just society does not abandon the poor, but neither does it turn man into a passive being dependent on impersonal structures.

Subsidiarity reminds us that the healthiest human solutions are often born from below:

- the family;
- the parish;
- the community;
- dignified work;

- close solidarity;
- shared responsibility.

The Church does not offer simplistic answers. It offers something more difficult and more profound: an integral vision of the human person.

And perhaps that is precisely the great need of our time.