

## THE COMMON WEAL AND MORALITY

### *Criteria for conceptualizing the dialogue on common good*

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*(Abstract)* Economic (and with it social) crises of our days have again drawn attention to the fact that the definition of the common good has an exceptional importance from the perspective of stable and peaceful human coexistence. In our present paper we will attempt to identify some specific open-ended questions through the analysis of the concept of the common good. In addition, we would like to clarify through the example of the teaching of Pope Francis what are possible directions to move forward, which aspects should be taken into consideration and through which principles can we initiate a fruitful and effective social dialogue on the common good.

*Keywords:* common good, culture, society, ethics, dialogue, religion, Pope Francis

#### *Outline of the study:*

- Core principles and objectives (of the concept of the common good)
- The common good and values
- The materialization of the concept of the common good
- The common good and moral commitment
- Pope Francis's reflections

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Today's economic crisis has drawn attention to the fact that on the one hand, the perception that the market is self-balancing, self-regulatory in nature, that more profit results in a higher degree of social well-being is unsustainable, and that on the other hand in pluralistic societies the definition of the common good is not as simple as previously thought. Therefore, it is useful if not essential to study the concept of common good and try to understand fully how it can help to establish a fairer thus more stable social order. We must take into account that if it fails, individual or group interests replacing common good will cause growing tensions between individuals and smaller communities. The issue also has a new urgency because in our globalized world it is becoming ever more important to define the comprehensive human, global common good; without this concept it seems to be inevitable that international conflicts will become more frequent with devastating economic, but also political and moral consequences. If there is no principle to help to think of countries or nations, or of humankind (of the international community) as one, the world becomes a battlefield of conflicting interests. In this world it will be more and more difficult to provide decent living

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conditions, and well-being and security will be a privilege of the few (or we could say: a prey stolen from others).

### 1) Core principles and objectives

A human is inherently a *zoon politicon*, a social being.<sup>1</sup> This means that human existence can only be imagined in some kind of a social-cultural, institutionalized system. The human individual as *atomos*, as a person in an extremely individualistic sense, cannot unfold its own opportunities, talents alone. We depend on each other, thus based on our specific constitution we require the social dimension of existence.

This insight, however, immediately raises the question: how can human communality, organized and institutionalized social life come into existence? While there are those who believe that this process is solely and exclusively based on our biological and natural determination and needs, this view appears to be unsustainable.<sup>2</sup> Namely because throughout their historical unfolding our societies display a particular driving force: a community objective that organizes individual interests next to each other and brings forward the forming of groups effectively; an objective not only of natural but also of cultural nature. Since this is so, no wonder that real and practical meaning of the concept of the common good depends on the socio-historical context.<sup>3</sup>

According to H. Marrou a social group (an institutionalized unit of individuals showing determined order and consistency) forms an integral cultural entity if the group shares ideals, thoughts on the essential purpose of man and on the necessary instruments to achieve this goal.<sup>4</sup> In the history of European culture this common ideal or thought was for a long time defined by Christian philosophy. The concept of common good reached its special definition in the middle ages which served as a basis for modern thinking. “The notion of the Latin *bonum commune* on the one hand represents a *good* that on the other hand is *good for everyone*; it is a *common* good for all, a value, a richness, a fulfillment.”<sup>5</sup> This definition presupposes some kind of ideological-moral order (at least in principle, even if not in every detail) shared or accepted by every member of the community (society).

Along with this, in the classic concept of the common good can be found the anthropological insight, according to which the values (not only in the material sense), no matter how perfectly suited to the individual, ultimately, in terms of their realization are dependent on the community that includes the individual. The common good, therefore, can be interpreted as a specific realization of the values that is impossible to take place outside of an organized society or a cultural system.<sup>6</sup> The individual can fulfill his specific benefit within the framework of the community. As is shown in research on the history of philosophy, the notion of *res publica* and *salus publica* had an impact on this insight.<sup>7</sup> The first one emphasizes the viewpoint that the essence of society (state) is a community of matters or things (*res*) which are public/common (*publica*), so they concern each citizen, while the second dimension focuses on salvation (*salus*; not merely in the religious sense), which can constitute of existential security as protection or of well-being, that is ultimately fulfilled not on an individual, but on a public/common (*publica*), community level. This is the reason why the full identification of the good in the sense of community (Gemeinschaftsgut), the common good (Gemeinwohl), the public interest (Gemeinnutz, Gemeininteresse) can be observed in several European languages.<sup>8</sup>

This perspective has an unspoken yet indispensable prerequisite: a real-life community has to exist among the members of society.<sup>9</sup> The community as *koinonia*, *communio* means that members share, give and get from both material and spiritual-moral goods.<sup>10</sup> Every community that either inward (caste system, elitism,

<sup>1</sup> *Politicon* as an adjective in its original Greek sense, based on the concept of *polis*; meaning ‘sociality’, and not ‘politics’ in contemporary terms.

<sup>2</sup> For more details: RICKEN, Fr., *Warum Moral nicht naturalisiert werden kann*, in *Topologien des Menschlichen*, vol. 2: *Der Mensch – ein freies Wesen? Autonomie – Personalität – Verantwortung* (Editors: Schmidinger, H.–Sedmak, Cl.), WBG, Darmstadt 2005, 249–258.

<sup>3</sup> See: HERZOG, R., art. *Gemeinwohl II*, in *HWPh* 3,256–258, 257.

<sup>4</sup> MARROU, H., *Storia dell’educazione nella antichità*, Studium, Roma 1966, 140; Quoted by: MONDIN, B., *Filosofia della cultura e dei valori* (Problemi del nostro tempo 87), Massimo, Milano 1994, 98

<sup>5</sup> KERBER, W., art. *Gemeinwohl*, in *LThK*<sup>3</sup> 4,439–440, 439.

<sup>6</sup> KERBER, W., art. *Gemeinwohl*, in *LThK*<sup>3</sup> 4,439–440, 439.

<sup>7</sup> See HERZOG, R., art. *Gemeinwohl II*, in *HWPh* 3,256–258, 257.

<sup>8</sup> DE VRIES, J.–LOTZ, J. B., *Philosophie im Grundriss*, Echter, Würzburg 1969, 331.

<sup>9</sup> DE VRIES, J.–LOTZ, J. B., *Philosophie im Grundriss*, Echter, Würzburg 1969, 331.

<sup>10</sup> See TÖRÖK, Cs., *Az Egyház mint communio. A közösség-gondolat teológiai értelmezésének kritériumai*, in *Communio* 19 (2011/1–2), 61–93 (especially the first chapter).

privileging the few) or outward (nationalism, racism) inhibits the operation of the *communio*-dynamics, so inhibits the participation of some individuals or groups in the sharing or in the communication (in the original sense of the word), essentially wounds or weakens the realization of the common good as well.

## 2) The common good and values

The concept of the common good is not an abstract, general reality without specific content or extent. Yet it is based on well-defined and identifiable values or value systems varying or changing by culture to culture. “The weight of values on social dynamics and on cultural order is enormous. Everything people think and create, their ventures, artistic, literary, religious works, etc. are getting their inspiration from values.”<sup>11</sup> These works either indirectly, either directly express the conceptions of the affected human community on the common good as well.

However, a very important principle should be established in this field. The primary goal should always be the benefit, the good of the community. The individual interests or good of members of the community is in a subordinated secondary position compared to this.<sup>12</sup> Therefore common good in a social sense is a purpose or value which every citizen is obliged to achieve. This is not (necessarily) always of moral nature, it can be quite practical (e.g., subjecting private property rights in the interest of the community when a natural disaster can only be prevented by sacrificing private land).<sup>13</sup> Behind all this lays the idea that the individual throughout his self-realization is dependent on the universal order.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the part is interpreted from the viewpoint of the whole; the whole is always more than the mere sum of the parts (the whole is not determined by the part, but vice versa).

We cannot deny that this approach can entail serious risks. The National Socialist dictatorship committed one of history's worst genocide referring to the German national interest and benefit, with the support of a wide range of social groups. The communist dictatorship trampled into the dust one of the oldest human rights, the right to private property for the benefit of the community, preaching the idea (the utopia) of public property. It is the irony of history that in the „Eastern bloc”, after a few decades of „phylogeny”, the theoretic experts of universities of public property became the most practical professionals of private ownership after the privatization. Series of examples from history could go on for a long time. One thing is certain: if we accept without further restriction that the common good declared on a central, political and legislative level can overcome individual interests, benefits or rights without a right to appeal, then we basically make the reference to the common good the principle of dictatorship.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, it became important from the eighteenth century that the inalienable rights of man would be formulated. Today, in public opinion and in legislation human rights represent the moral criteria that weigh the admissibility or inadmissibility of the rhetoric on the common good. For if humans as individuals have certain inalienable rights (e.g. the right to dignity, freedom, speech) deriving from human constitutions, then it also means that the common good (within the meaning of the state interest) is being constantly and inextricably limited by these rights.<sup>16</sup> After all, the idea of a common good - because of the principles outlined in the *Core principles and objectives* section – can never mean the destruction of individuals' livelihood. In other words, if we formulate the content of the common good with a moral claim, from the individual's assets, then it must be said that

a) in ideal conditions the assets or interests of the individual and of the community coincide,<sup>17</sup>

b) however, if in the light of practical conditions and resources this ideal situation may not always exist, it is not acceptable to define the common good by bypassing individual assets and other values.

Therefore, we must accept O. von Nell-Breunig's definition of the public good, which is the most commonly accepted formation: “...[the public good is a] summary description of every measure that as a precondition has to be implemented in a community so the individuals can reach their individual and

<sup>11</sup> MONDIN, B., *Filosofia della cultura e dei valori*, 99. (Translated from the Hungarian text.)

<sup>12</sup> DE VRIES, J.–LOTZ, J. B., *Philosophie im Grundriss*, 331–332; vö. KERBER, W., art. *Gemeinwohl*, in LThK<sup>3</sup> 4,440: „Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz”.

<sup>13</sup> KERBER, W., art. *Gemeinwohl*, in LThK<sup>3</sup> 4,439.

<sup>14</sup> REDAKTION, art. *Gemeinwohl I.*, in HWPh 3,248–256, 248.

<sup>15</sup> Here we cannot elaborate in detail the path of voluntarist formulation of state interest from Macchiavelli to the enlightened absolutism - and further. One thing is certain: the identification of public good with state interest (royal interest) eventually eradicates the common good.

<sup>16</sup> See KERBER, W., art. *Gemeinwohl*, in LThK<sup>3</sup> 4,440.

<sup>17</sup> See REDAKTION, art. *Gemeinwohl I.*, in HWPh 3,248.

community benefits (their share of the common good) with the use of their own resources.”<sup>18</sup> For that reason, although we have to maintain the priority of the common good over individual assets, but we cannot attempt to achieve the former one aggressively at the expense of the latter.<sup>19</sup>

### 3) The materialization of the concept of the common good

In the Western world, which is now considered to be secular, in the state-society level discourse (exactly because its secular character) basically we approach the concept of the common good from the direction of an economic sense of welfare. Behind this lays the idea that emerged in the early capitalism, that the public interest of the state is nothing more than the greatest possible well-being for the largest possible number of citizens. But then would this mean that an economically, industrially and scientifically advanced society automatically ensures the highest possible level common good of the human community? Let's put it in an even simpler way: the common good is nothing more than economic interest and benefit?

„Unfortunately it is true that modern culture, especially in the West, because of the secularization primarily and almost exclusively worked on material prosperity reaching stunning results in terms of assets, but caused more and more extensive social discomfort carving a deeper and deeper emptiness into the conscience.”<sup>20</sup> What is this empty space of conscience? The famous German thinker, R. Guardini, reflecting on the horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century European history, concludes that “for horrors conducted by such great awareness we cannot blame only some degenerate minds or small groups; they derive from the lack of order and from poisonings which have been going on for a long time. Moral law, responsibility, respect, listening to the conscience cannot vanish so quickly from the community behavior, unless they have been evaluated beforehand. All this would not have happened if culture would have been how modern times saw it.”<sup>21</sup> How did modern times see human culture? A kind of scientific progress, a series of technical achievements, essentially an economic and material unfold.<sup>22</sup> The idea that cultures are actually (value)neutral goes together with this; that different symbolic, social systems that are neither good nor bad. But exactly these historical events shows that cultures (regardless of the degree of their technical civilization) are governed by a number of ideas, values, views of non-material nature, which non-material (technical, scientific, industrial, economic, or even ideological) factors dramatically affect the interpretation of the common good.

Therefore this statement appears to be correct: „Economic good is a prerequisite for the general and human fulfillment of all members of society, and this fulfillment that people may reach within society, (...) also includes values that cannot be achieved outside of society.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, the implementation of the common good is inseparable from the material based development, but it is neither identifiable with the assets of the community, nor can be perceived as a one and only goal.

### 4) The common good and moral commitment

Behind the clearer and clearer materialization of the concept of the common good it is tangible the classical philosophical basic principle, that the whole determines the part and the part in its self-realization is essentially depending on the whole (that is to say: a person as an individual can only fully unfold his/her own humanity as a member of a community). The extreme individual approach ultimately obscures the wholesome, fully featured sight of society, culture, state. “Society as a unification of so many people into a higher-level unit undoubtedly has its own value, significance and beauty, and this aspect cannot be sacrificed for the sake of a purely utilitarian approach.”<sup>24</sup> The interpretation of the individual good as basic material interest does not allow us to satisfactorily explore the concept of the good that can only be reached or accomplished on a higher level. For if the individual fulfills all his needs, desires and dreams, we still cannot assume that this particular culture reached its goal. After all, „the direct object of the culture (...) is the people. The culture attempts to both individually and *socially* realize the people” (emphasis added by the

<sup>18</sup> Quotes: KERBER, W., art. *Gemeinwohl*, in LThK<sup>3</sup> 4,440. (Translated from the Hungarian text.)

<sup>19</sup> See DE VRIES, J.-LOTZ, J. B., *Philosophie im Grundriss*, 332.

<sup>20</sup> MONDIN, B., *Filosofia della cultura e dei valori*, 101. (Translated from the Hungarian text.)

<sup>21</sup> GUARDINI, R., *Fine dell'epoca moderna*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1964, 89; idézi: MONDIN, B., *Filosofia della cultura e dei valori*, 107. (Translated from the Hungarian text.)

<sup>22</sup> To separate technical achievements from the system of spiritual values, a number of authors (including I. Kant) separated the concepts of civilization and culture. This phenomenon appeared less in the Anglo-Saxon literature, but is common in continental philosophy.

<sup>23</sup> DE VRIES, J.-LOTZ, J. B., *Philosophie im Grundriss*, 332. (Translated from the Hungarian text.)

<sup>24</sup> DE VRIES, J.-LOTZ, J. B., *Philosophie im Grundriss*, 332. (Translated from the Hungarian text.)

author).<sup>25</sup> Man as a *zoon politicon* with the overemphasis of (or even exclusively by) individual interest can never achieve the *humanum*, which is always and necessarily *sociale* as well.

Therefore the relationship of the part with the whole, of the human individual with the community is in every case of moral nature, so it is driven by rules and principles that exceed the mere juxtaposition, the level of a merely material interaction between the individual and the group (such moral principles are, for example, sacrifice, solidarity, commitment, loyalty). Without these we could not speak of anything more than the arrangement of individual interests next to each other as effectively as possible, as well as of self-restraint for the benefit of each other. So even if we would reach for as many citizens as possible at the highest possible level of material well-being (which is the current status of our times and in the light of the nature of the global economic crisis seems to be a pipe dream or a foggy utopia), you could not say that we achieved the common good. For this to be fulfilled some kind of moral order is needed that can create a framework that on the one hand controls the relationship of the individual and the community, on the other hand provides a living tissue, in which a common good (not merely in a materially sense) could be realized.<sup>26</sup>

But it becomes apparent reaching the level of morality that the common good is not only guiding principle, an abstract idea, but a dynamic and practical system of requirements as well. After all, good from a moral point of view is not a natural gift that was once declared to exist all along, but a virtue in the classical sense of the word: something for which we fight, what we learn in practice.<sup>27</sup> The virtuous man is not born virtuous, but rather becomes virtuous. A virtuous man will lose his morality without exercising freely and knowingly the acquired virtues in everyday life.

Here, of course, raises another possible aspect of investigation: the term of common good, with its moral implications (exactly because of its own moral nature, which is never entirely attributable to purely material factors and needs), contains the potential of transcendental reflection. It is true that the immediate objective of the culture (*finis proximus*) is man – but can it be stated that at the same time the man is also the destination of culture (*finis ultimus*)? If the concept of the common good is inseparable from the idea of moral good, then we need to consider:

a) What is the condition of possibility to get to know the concept of good not only understood as interest, benefit or advantage (if an understanding like this exists; but if not, because of the considerations outlined above we clearly get to the material emptiness and nakedness of the notion of the common good)?

b) What is the condition of possibility for people to engage for the recognized greater good, even if that may causes harm here and now? In other words: Why should I do good even if it does not benefit me directly, or perhaps even in the long run only brings me disadvantages (the most obvious example is sacrificing the life for another human being's life – this action is the par excellence achievement of good, it has no chance of either direct or indirect, either immediate or long-term benefits, and with the moral action the actor loses his existence)?

When studying contemporary ideas on the issues of the common good, three distinct levels are observed, and within each one the need for the above described double reflection can be postulated.<sup>28</sup>

- *In a social sense*: common good as the counterpole of individual interest in social life;
- *In a political sense*: common good as the community counterweight of party interests;
- *In the content of state theory*: group interest should be subordinate to common good (common interest) as defined by the state.

As mentioned above, the same questions arise on all three levels: On what basis is it presumed that there is a graspable and definable (common) good? Why do we believe that its implementation is better than its rejection? More specifically, with respect to the above described three issues: Why is it better to do something for the benefit of the community, than for my own good? Why should the interests of my party (my belief, my religion) be subordinated to the good of a whole that (in vision, in mentality) might be strange for me? Why is it a value putting on the second place the interest of a smaller (but along more direct and personal) group for the benefit of a bigger (but therefore more impersonal, alien) group?

There are various social phenomena which show that we have serious problems in this area. As examples, the spread of injustice accompanied by social indifference, the lack of consequences, low willingness to volunteer, or the vulnerability of public community positions on moral issues, the uncertainty and confusion

<sup>25</sup> MONDIN, B., *Filosofia della cultura e dei valori*, 112.

<sup>26</sup> DE VRIES, J.-LOTZ, J. B., *Philosophie im Grundriss*, 332.

<sup>27</sup> Vö. MONDIN, B., *Filosofia della cultura e dei valori*, 107.

<sup>28</sup> Ld. HERZOG, R., art. *Gemeinwohl II*, in HWPPh 3,256–258, 257.

around the moral resolution of communities. All these issues point out that the study of the moral dimensions of the question regarding the common good requires a lot more effort from us.

### 5) Pope Francis's reflections

In our days it has become clear that the theoretical and ethical issues arising in connection with the concept of the common good require the joint contemplation of the important aspects of the given culture.<sup>29</sup> The secular state also has to recognize the gravity of the decisions made by religious people based on their conscience, specifically because in practice it also has an impact on the state and on the functioning of society. The double lecture of J. Habermas and Cardinal J. Ratzinger organized by the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities was an endeavor on this common journey.<sup>30</sup> The Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith shortly afterwards took his place on the papal throne as XVI. Benedict, and as head of the Catholic Church wrote an encyclical on the global economic crisis beginning with the words *Caritas in veritate*, in which defines the common good the following way:

„To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of “all of us”, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the *common good* and strive towards it is a *requirement of justice and charity*. To take a stand for the common good is on the one hand to be solicitous for, and on the other hand to avail oneself of, that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically and culturally, making it the *pólis*, or “city”.” (no. 7).

The above quote shows that the pope stands within the framework of the classical philosophical thinking, follows the European tradition. However, we also have to realize that this approach (exactly because of the traditional approach) does not really add a new element to the analysis, it is less inspiring in terms of the search of a future path. In fact, it can mostly be considered a summary, a synthetic definition.

The first apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis (*Evangelii gaudium*) offers a start with a new kind of outlook, expanded perspective and renewed impetus in this area. The third subsection of the fourth chapter of this document is entitled “*The common good and peace in society*” (no. 217-237). As this brief title implies, the common good is displayed not in itself, but in the context of the internal peace of the society, allowing a descriptive definition, which paves the way for new approaches to capture:

“Peace in society cannot be understood as pacification or the mere absence of violence resulting from the domination of one part of society over others. Nor does true peace act as a pretext for justifying a social structure which silences or appeases the poor, so that the more affluent can placidly support their lifestyle while others have to make do as they can. Demands involving the distribution of wealth, concern for the poor and human rights cannot be suppressed under the guise of creating a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority. The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised.” (no. 218).

The Pope's analysis of the situation is clear: today the concept of the common good has become a political and ideological toy which is only used to underpin the rich and privileged lifestyle, and as far as possible, to silence the broad masses who are not benefitting sufficiently from the economic and social goods. In other words, in our days when we hear the expression *common good* from the mouth of decision makers, we have to take into consideration that we might become victims of distraction, manipulation and exploitation. We have mentioned these risks above.

What is this „prophetic voice”, the message that the Catholic Church can articulate in this area? How can thereby a religious community contribute to the benefit and the general well-being of the secular society? Pope Francis highlights four aspects, principles to apply:

- *The time is greater than space* (no. 222-225). Firstly we have to take two main concepts into consideration: fullness and limitation. While the limitation is always appears in space, fullness unfolds in time as a process. For this reason, for the promotion of common good an approach is needed that uses models that move forward and are implemented step by step in time, instead of building ideologies around limitations existing in the present time. “Giving priority to time means being concerned about *initiating processes rather than possessing spaces*. Time governs spaces, illumines them and makes them links in a constantly expanding chain, with no possibility of return. What we need, then, is to give priority to actions

<sup>29</sup> See also. ERDŐ, P., *Gazdaság és erkölcs*, in *South-East Europe International Relations Quarterly* 4 (2013/1), 5 p.

<sup>30</sup> See. HABERMAS, J.–RATZINGER, J., *A szabadelvű állam morális alapjai*, Gondolat, Budapest 2007.

which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events.” (no. 223).

– *Unity prevails over conflict* (no. 226–230). As mentioned above, if common good is interpreted as juxtaposed interests, sooner or later inevitable conflicts of interest will arise. At this point if the claim of the individual (the group, an inner circle) has priority, a bitter fight will take place that destroys all human goodness. However, if the person (the group, an inner circle) is capable of subordinating his claim to the adoption of the other one or to the essential social need of solidarity, then there is a chance for a solution that promotes the common good. “Solidarity, in its deepest and most challenging sense, thus becomes a way of making history in a life setting where conflicts, tensions and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity. This is not to opt for a kind of syncretism, or for the absorption of one into the other, but rather for a resolution which takes place on a higher plane and preserves what is valid and useful on both sides.” (no. 228)

– *Realities are more important than ideas* (no. 231–233). This is a principle that is easy to understand for everyone. We all have experienced that we may face in all areas of the human existence the hazard of being too theoretical: in personal relationships (world of emotions or ideas without specific assistance or help) as on a social level (political slogans and programs ignoring reality, even making an ideology of it and developing the ‘loyalty to the idea’ which can be very fruitless sometimes). Clearly, the problem is not with thoughts or ideas but with proclaiming and using them in a way that is estranged from reality; wounding hearts with empty slogans of ‘loyalty to the idea’. “Ideas – conceptual elaborations – are at the service of communication, understanding, and praxis. Ideas disconnected from realities give rise to ineffectual forms of idealism and nominalism, capable at most of classifying and defining, but certainly not calling to action. What calls us to action are realities illuminated by reason. Formal nominalism has to give way to harmonious objectivity.” (no. 232.) We must confess that this principle has special significance for religious people, because sophistication on faith often forgets that the aim would be practical engagement.

– *The whole is greater than the part* (no. 234–237). In connection with the concept of the common good we drew attention to the importance of this principle many times and from many aspects. The whole, the culture, the society always has some surplus compared to the mathematical sum of the parts, of the members, citizens; and this addition has a key importance in defining the common good. “The whole is greater than the part, but it is also greater than the sum of its parts. There is no need, then, to be overly obsessed with limited and particular questions.” (no. 235.) In other words, we must learn art of thinking in the whole. However, this cannot mean superficial generalization or the uncritical projection of details on the whole. Pope Francis offers an expressive metaphor to define the nature of this principle: “Here our model is not the sphere, which is no greater than its parts, where every point is equidistant from the center, and there are no differences between them. Instead, it is the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness.” (no. 236.)

The practical application of these principles has consequences in the society. These practicalities are essential to the authentic achievement of the common good. Their number might be as many as the different life situations we encounter. The *Evangelii gaudium* only highlights a few that are of higher importance to the Christian people and from the Church's point of view (but they have an impact on the realization of the common good beyond the church as well):

– To care for, to accept and to address the poor and the marginalized; the indispensability of solutions and realistic answers to real problems; taking seriously the weakness, the helplessness, the vulnerability; the need to listen and to take care of others. (no. 186-216).

– Initiation of a society-wide dialogue, deepening the dialogue between faith and science, cultural dimensions of social groups, encouraging ecumenical, inter-religions and non-confessional dialogue to promote peace throughout society (No. 238-258).

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Thank you for your kind collaboration. *Editor-in-Chief*