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Is it possible to apply the Catholic doctrine to the common good of the company?

Abstract

The rationale for this article lies, on one hand, in the need to address the perennial organisational problems of companies. On the other hand, the rationale of this article lies in the fact that the Catholic Church has not yet explicitly dealt with aspects related to the function, structure, and management of companies (Kennedy, 2002), despite having an extensive doctrine applicable to this field. All the published evidence to date shows that Catholic doctrine contains more than sufficient judgment elements to tackle the complex problems of the business world. This article proposes an approach to Catholic doctrine in formulating the common good within the company, considering its different dimensions (economic, social, cultural) and various forms of unity: origin, organisation, and action. This must be applied in a way that helps strengthen it as a human institution, given its prominent role in contemporary societies. At the same time, this article has also been written with the purpose of finding alternative principles, procedures, and attitudes that contribute to the survival, balance, and improvement of businesses in their social role. This should always be from the perspective of the Church's social doctrine and from a justified conception of the company as a political community belonging to larger communities.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; economic thought; faith; productive systems; profits

Opsomming

Is dit moontlik om die Katolieke leerstellings op die algemene beswil van die maatskappy toe te pas?

Die rasionaal vir hierdie artikel lê, aan die een kant, in die behoefte om op die voortdurende organisatoriese probleme van maatskappye te fokus. Aan die ander kant lê die rasionaal van hierdie artikel daarin dat die Katolieke Kerk nog nie uitdruklik aandag gegee het aan aspekte wat met die funksie, struktuur en bestuur van maatskappye verband hou nie (Kennedy, 2002), al beskik dit oor uitgebreide leerstellings wat op hierdie veld van toepassing is. Al die gepubliseerde bewyse tot op hede toon dat die Katolieke leer meer as voldoende beoordelingsgronde bevat om die komplekse probleme van die sakewêreld aan te pak. Hierdie artikel stel 'n benadering tot die Katolieke leer voor in die formulering van die algemene beswil binne die maatskappy, met inagneming van sy verskillende dimensies (ekonomies, sosiaal, kultureel) en verskillende vorme van eenheid: oorsprong, organisasie en handeling. Dit moet toegepas word op 'n wyse wat help om die maatskappy as 'n menslike instelling te versterk, gegewe sy prominente rol in hedendaagse samelewings.

Terselfdertyd is hierdie artikel ook geskryf met die doel om alternatiewe beginsels, prosedures en houdings vas te stel wat tot die oorlewing, balansering en verbetering van ondernemings in hul sosiale rol bydra. Dit behoort altyd te geskied vanuit die perspektief van die Kerk se sosiale leer en vanuit 'n geregverdigde opvatting van die maatskappy as 'n politieke gemeenskap wat deel van groter gemeenskappe uitmaak.

Kernbegrippe: geloof; ekonomiese denke; maatskaplike verantwoordelikheid van ondernemings; produktiewe stelsels; winste

1. Introduction

The oral and civic norms, often rooted in religious traditions, shape interactions among individuals, businesses, and institutions, significantly influencing economic behaviour (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021). Catholic social teaching—the Church’s practical ethical framework, distinct from its theological doctrines on spiritual salvation—offers actionable guidance for addressing economic challenges. As the oldest and largest global organisation, the Catholic Church wields unparalleled moral and institutional authority, uniting diverse communities towards the common good (Calkins, 2000; Soloviev, 2021). Its historical adaptability (balancing centralised principles with local autonomy) provides a model for businesses seeking sustainable, ethical governance. Catholic social teaching emphasises that the economy must serve humanity, prioritising human dignity over profit (Pope Francis, 2020), aligning with Aristotelian philosophy, which views businesses as communities within broader societal systems (Melé, 2012).

The problem this study addresses is the moral deficit in conventional business ethics, which often relies on individualistic or utilitarian frameworks, such as shareholder primacy or stakeholder theory, that inadequately promote the common good (Freeman, 1984). Shareholder-focused models prioritise profit, often neglecting societal and employee well-being, while utilitarian approaches may sacrifice individual dignity for the sake of aggregate benefits. For example, stakeholder theory balances competing interests but lacks a universal moral foundation, leading to inconsistent ethical outcomes.

In contrast, Catholic social teaching offers a comprehensive framework that integrates economic, political, and cultural dimensions to foster the common good, defined as the conditions that enable individual and collective flourishing. This study argues that Catholic social teaching provides a superior alternative to traditional business economics by grounding corporate purpose in human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity, thereby enhancing governance and societal impact. Applying Catholic social teaching to business faces significant challenges. Critics, such as Novak (1993), argue that its principles are too abstract for profit-driven, secular markets, where financial performance often overshadows ethical considerations. The Church’s involvement in economic affairs may be seen as overstepping its spiritual mandate, raising concerns about its legitimacy in shaping business practices.

Additionally, in pluralistic workforces, employees may resist religious frameworks, favouring secular approaches like environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards, which prioritise measurable outcomes over moral principles. Secular environments may also view Catholic social teaching as dogmatic, which can complicate its application in diverse settings. Despite these tensions, the Church’s universal mission and expertise in organising communities for shared goals offer valuable insights for reimagining businesses as ethical communities (Calkins, 2000). By addressing these challenges, this study contributes to current debates on the role of moral institutions in shaping economic systems, particularly within the context of Catholic social thought. Catholic social teaching is not a static doctrine but a dynamic critique of social and economic issues, evolving since the Patristic era through papal encyclicals (Kennedy, 2002). Documents such as *Rerum novarum* (1891) and *Centesimus annus* (1991) address local and global economic challenges, offering practical guidance beyond abstract theorising. Unlike secular business ethics, which may prioritise efficiency or compliance, Catholic social teaching emphasises human development across economic, political, and cultural spheres. For instance, it advocates for fair wages, worker participation, and ethical governance, contrasting with utilitarian models that may justify exploitation for profit (Freeman, 1984).

This study explores how Catholic social teaching can guide businesses towards the common good through unities of origin (shared purpose), order (ethical governance), and action (collaborative effort). It reviews Church teachings on business-society interactions, contrasting them with secular frameworks to propose actionable principles for modern companies. By addressing the moral gap in business ethics, this article positions Catholic social teaching as a vital framework for fostering ethical and sustainable businesses in contemporary society.

2. General and specific common good in the company

Human phenomena primarily have a collective character (Frémeaux & Michelson, 2017), and in business, as in any society of people, its members come together for a common purpose. *A priori*, the most visible shared goal (but not the only one) would be to obtain remuneration to meet subsistence needs (Lluch, 2015). The social doctrine of the Church, particularly the papal encyclicals, views the company as an intermediary institution primarily serving the economic needs of societies, and ultimately, justice, and the common good (Muñoz, 2014). This demands reflection on the concept of the common good as a subject of study in business. However, before that, we must clarify what the Church understands by the concept of the common good.

Since the common good is the element that shapes the entire social structure (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the common good as follows: the sum total of the social conditions that allow people (either in groups or individually) to reach their fulfilment. In parallel, the common good of the business encompasses both the organisation as a whole and its members, referring to all the conditions (technical, financial, strategic, moral, and political) that ensure the development of each member and the business as a whole. The common good, as understood by Catholic doctrine, addresses human needs not only materially, but also morally and spiritually, at both the individual and collective levels (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021). However, let us not forget that the concept of the common good in the Church is for all people and is indivisible; it cannot be divided or shared. It remains common because only in this way can it be achieved; the implication for business is as follows: the common good advocated by the Catholic Church has both a community dimension and a social dimension (Montuschi, 2007). This means that the common good in the context of a business has a community dimension (the good of the company as an organisation) and a social dimension (the good of the people within the company and those within the surrounding business environment).

For this study, we will start from the three-dimensional distinction that the social doctrine of the Church considers conjunctively (Kennedy, 2002):

- a. the economic dimension, which addresses the meeting of human needs with available economic means
- b. the political dimension, where the Catholic Church reflects on governance and the appropriate use of power
- c. the cultural dimension, which refers to customs and practices that enrich, form, and provide identity to the members of any community

At all times, the Church encompasses the study of business activities, considering everything related to the human being and their needs (Scalzo, 2018). Thus, we approach the study of the common good in business. This is done by considering its political, economic, and cultural dimensions, as it is an intermediary society, in fact, a human community interacting with others at different levels. The company must meet economic needs both within itself and outside; it operates under a specific form of governance, which is more or less complex. In turn, there is a business culture that gives the company its identity and its members, who form and enrich it through their contributions and improvements.

All of this summarises the final goal of production as seen by the Catholic Church, according to which production is not limited to manufacturing economic goods but to offering a service capable of addressing the entire range of human needs. These human needs include moral, intellectual, and religious needs, as reflected in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* of the Second Vatican Council (2021). Later, in *Gaudium et spes*, the conjunctive unity of the economic, political, and cultural dimensions in business is highlighted. Subsequently, social doctrine in papal encyclicals such as *Centesimus annus* (1991) emphasises that the adequate production of goods and services can only be achieved through the cooperation of workers towards a common goal. In this encyclical, Pope John Paul II asserts that such cooperation must occur through the most effective and realistic models of business life organisation (also referring to governance), which internalise cultural elements.

These three dimensions coexist in the business, and this coexistence gives content to two types of common good concerning the company: the general common good and the specific common good. The common good is achieved when the satisfaction of society's needs (which are not merely economic) and those of all members of the company converge, along with good corporate governance and the cultural identification of the company's personnel.

The general and specific common goods can be differentiated and individualised, but cannot be separated. By way of illustration: When a company produces and markets goods and services of social use, it is generating the resources to remunerate the members of the organisation. Catholic doctrine also encompasses and develops the idea that the company implicitly serves society while pursuing its own survival and growth.

It should be added that the specific good of the company, by its complementary nature, cannot be detached from the general good of the community in which it resides. Catholic doctrine goes so far as to oppose the pursuit of a collective good when it is carried out by harmful means (Wojtyła, 2017). In other words, it maintains that one must oppose the company's good if it comes at the expense of harming the region or country in which it is located.

2.1 The general common good

The general "common good" refers to the idea that the company is a subsystem belonging to a larger system, meaning it is part of a greater political-economic whole, such as the countries, regions, or localities in which it is located and with which it interacts. Therefore, it must participate for the good of the society of which it is an integral part (Garriga & Melé, 2004). In this regard, the Catholic Church considers the company to be a very important actor in social justice (Booth & Peterson, 2018). Saint Thomas Aquinas already emphasised the fundamental role that the production of goods and services plays in ensuring the survival of human communities (Frémeaux & Michelson, 2017). This doctrine extends to the present day: In the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis stated that the productive and distributive activity of businesses serves the common good insofar as it increases production and makes it more accessible to the population. As businesses increase the variety of goods and services available to the population, individuals see an increase in opportunities for development and improvement (Zadroga, 2022). The Catholic social doctrine also emphasises that the goods and services offered must not, under any circumstances, be mere commodities. Instead, they must be true goods for the population, thus highlighting their social and political nature. From all these contributions, one can infer the need for value creation and its reasonable distribution as an indispensable requirement to contribute to the general common good.

Additionally, Catholic social doctrine highlights that the company not only provides economic goods to society. It also provides social goods by fostering collaboration, encounters, or the appreciation of people's abilities (Montuschi, 2007). This is why it can be said that the company is a necessary collaborator in both human and personal development.

2.2 The specific common good

This refers to the internal good within the organisation, encompassing both the collective good of the company as a whole and the individual good of each of its members. Managers guided by Catholic principles demonstrate attentiveness to the needs of each employee, recognising the intrinsic value of all members and prioritising the common good of the organisation. Catholic social teaching, particularly in the encyclical *Pacem in terris*, underscores the importance of providing workers with fair and sufficient wages to ensure a decent standard of living for their families (John XXIII, 2021). Similarly, the *Gaudium et spes* pastoral constitution emphasises that wages should support not only the economic well-being of the family but also its social, cultural, and spiritual development. Meeting employees' needs, in turn, enables them to realise their full potential, which benefits the organisation as a whole (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021). Moreover, the collaborative nature of business activities necessitates worker engagement, as goods and services cannot be produced without it (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021). As demonstrated by Elton Mayo, collaboration is fundamental to productivity (Omolawal, 2021; Zuluaga-Buriticá & Castellanos-Polo, 2023).

Within Catholic social doctrine, worker participation in organisational decision-making is also essential, as affirmed in the encyclicals *Mater et magistra* (1961) and *Centesimus annus* (1991). Political freedom, understood as active participation in communal organisation, is reinforced by the principle of subsidiarity (Melé & Garriga, 2004). In *Rerum novarum* (Leo XIII, 1891), drawing on the Aristotelian conception of humans as naturally social beings, subsidiarity provides a foundation for cooperation in business and the pursuit of the specific common good. Catholic teaching asserts that any action that enhances employees' well-being and capacities contributes positively to organisational performance and competitive success. Consequently, the integral development of workers constitutes a fundamental component of the specific common good within the company.

Furthermore, Frémeaux and Michelsen (2017) identify four managerial principles aligned with the implementation of the company's specific common good as emphasised in Catholic doctrine: long-term vision, synergy, unity, and realism. Catholic thought revives the Aristotelian notion of synergy, wherein the whole exceeds the sum of its parts (Francisco, 2013), implying that the common good in an organisation differs qualitatively from the aggregate of individual goods produced through business activity. Notably, synergy is recognised as a universal principle of organisational performance, corroborated by contemporary research (Kondratiev et al., 2022; Feldman & Hernandez, 2022). Regarding long-term vision, organisational changes should be assessed in terms of their enduring effects on personal development (Cornuel et al., 2010). Moreover, the Catholic perspective views the company, like any human community, as a unified entity founded upon bonds of solidarity and fraternity, as articulated in the encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (Benedict XVI, 2009). The principle of organisational unity from a Catholic viewpoint will be further elaborated below.

3. The company as a unity around the common good

Building on the encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, it can be asserted that the company constitutes a community because human truth is inherently relational (Benedict XVI, 2009). Central to Catholic thought is the necessity of unity within the organisation, which represents a *sine qua non* condition for its origin, continuity, and growth. As Saint John Paul II emphasises, unity generates community, not vice versa (Melé, 2012), since the formation of a community presupposes a network of relational ties that fosters a sense of membership. Contemporary organisations increasingly recognise the importance of cultivating employees' sense of belonging and promoting shared attitudes within the company (Riketta & Landerer, 2005). Indeed, the dispositions shared by personnel serve as a tangible indicator of organisational unity. Moreover, fostering such a sense of belonging has been shown to enhance organisational performance (Córcoles Muñoz et al., 2020). This underscores the

imperative for companies to be guided towards a common mission, the pursuit of which contributes not only to the prosperity of their members but also to the well-being of the broader environment in which the organisation operates.

Consistent with this perspective, Catholic teaching maintains that the company is a community whose members must collaborate to achieve mutual objectives, informed by Christian principles (John XXIII, 1961).

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican Secretary of State, further elaborated on this vision during his meeting with members of the Christian Union of Entrepreneurs and Managers in Rome (2008). He asserted that business activity should be conceived as a shared mission, centred on work relationships, human development, and the prudent use of resources.

Unity, therefore, provides the rationale for creating a community of people (Melé, 2012), positioning the company as more than a mere technical-administrative or profit-oriented unit. Rather, it is an organisational entity cohesively unified from the perspective of its members, an association of individuals directed towards a shared mission that fosters the development of their competitive strengths beyond mere economic gains. Furthermore, *Caritas in veritate* (Benedict XVI, 2009) suggests that the company functions as a core unit forming “concentric circles” with higher-order units (such as the political-economic system or civil society), thereby constituting an integrated and organic whole (Galán, 2009).

3.1 Unity of origin

The company is a political-economic institution, a political actor due to its recognised nature as an intermediary society and its necessary simultaneous involvement in both the public and private spheres, a phenomenon reflected in multiple studies (Néron, 2010; Scherer et al., 2014; Rasche, 2017; Meyer, 2022). Also, several studies have found parallels between the workers of a company and the citizens of a state (Néron, 2010). The reasons that justify the political nature of any company are four perspectives on the company: its role as a distributive agent, its character as a political community, its inevitable connection to social issues or matters of citizenship, and its active participation in the political processes of the national or local communities to which it belongs (Néron, 2010). It not only has a vast social impact due to its strategic location in all societies, but it is also a community of people as a form of citizen organisation (Néron, 2010).

This leads us to the concept of unity of origin and the nature of a company. According to the Church’s social doctrine, this concept lies in the creation of a community of people seeking to satisfy various social needs (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021), specifically the needs of its members and the community it serves. Even the knowledge shared among company members is not only professional but also social (Duarte, 2009). This social approach is rooted in the Catholic conception of the company as a community of people embedded in a larger community to which it provides service (Melé, 2012). The Catholic Church teaches that man is necessarily a social being rather than an individual, and therefore the primary reason for his activity throughout life is also social (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021). In line with this teaching, a person’s role within a company will remain social, regardless of their status as an owner, manager, or non-managerial employee.

According to García Echevarría (2020), the corporate nature of the company is its main value, as it creates wealth for society and generates a “dynamic” that contributes to the development of the person. This is where the unity of origin lies: in the basic purpose for which companies are born. At this point, the social doctrine of man established by the Catholic Church and formulated by Saint Thomas Aquinas becomes evident, according to which the rights of man precede those of society. Therefore, paradoxically, the ends of society are superior to the claims of any individual because they seek the good of humanity and, thus, the common good. When transferred to the realm of business, this constitutes the good of each of its members and the other people involved in the business activity.

Society thus becomes the solidaristic means for human existence and perfection (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021).

Ultimately, a company, like any other human community, must inherently have a common purpose that all its members collaborate towards achieving (Duarte, 2009). In fact, the company originally arose in the family nucleus, where a group of people gathered to carry out economic activities in order to attend to the family's common good and exchange products with other families. The common good is the ultimate goal of politically organised human societies in nations. Therefore, there is no reason to think that the ultimate goal of smaller communities within nations will not also be the common good, alongside the specific and own goals of each business unit (Duarte, 2009).

In summary, there are solid reasons to consider the company as a political community with a purpose rooted in unity, which is the common good. In this case, business activities would originally not be directed at any particular individual, but rather at achieving a good for all (Duarte, 2009). This makes the original business unity (unity of origin) incompatible with a heterogenesis of the human group's goals within the organisation.

3.2 Unity of order

Peter Drucker pointed out in *The end of economic man* (1939) that in every civilisation, organisations predominate due to their social nature; that is why the company, a social entity by nature, is organically a social body with the distinctive role of mainly (though not solely) performing economic functions. The planning, organisation, and execution of such functions also make it a unit of order. To understand the company as a unit of order, it is necessary to clarify that the Catholic Church does not conceive of the common good as an external norm to be imposed on the company, but rather as an internal and essential principle that links the creation of all goods by the organisation with the development of its workers (Zadroga, 2022). John Paul II, in *Laborem exercens* (1981), tells us that true association only exists when each person is a complete and active participant in the work projects in which they are involved. In other words, John Paul II reveals the position of the Catholic Church, previously expressed in *Gaudium et spes* from the Second Vatican Council, which advocates for the active participation of all people in the management of the company. This is the Catholic premise of the unity of order.

Indeed, the production of goods and services beneficial to society, along with the creation of value for the company and the enriching work of its members, requires the application of certain principles to guide the organisation of the company (Zadroga, 2022). In this way, the company is understood as a community capable of addressing the diverse needs (economic, social, moral, intellectual, and spiritual) of its workers and, by extension, of the society in which it interacts. Obviously, one of the guiding principles of good organisation must be the common good, which also politically inspires others, such as solidarity and subsidiarity, principles that form the backbone of Catholic social thought.

In management theory, the organisation is one of the elements of the company. It has traditionally been defined as the set of communication, coordination, and authority relationships between the members of the company and between them and the outside world. These relationships define the order in which other business elements are arranged and condition the structure of the company.

The company is a unit of order because it needs a structure to keep all the elements involved in business activities interconnected and coordinated. In this sense, the company is a systematic unit; a set of elements organised according to a specific structure to achieve predetermined objectives related to the system itself. From the perspective of the unit of order, the business model is structured, which contains a set of elements and relationships to achieve the specific goals of the company. In the conceptualisation of the company, its meaning as a unit of order is contained: it is necessarily a unit to the extent that it articulates

human, material, technical, and financial means directed towards the achievement of specific objectives (Bueno Campos, 2022). The unit of order requires not only a technical idea but also a social one, given the multidisciplinary nature of the company: a social organisation that employs a variety of elements to achieve its objectives (Buj & Cuadrado, 2021). However, the organisation of the company is not limited to a formal and functional system; its social character leads us to go beyond understanding it to reach its institutional-corporate dimension (García Echevarría, 2020). This obliges us to reconcile the company as a unit of order with its primordial meaning as a unit of origin. That is, not all orders are valid; there is a good order in the world of business.

From an exclusively formal analysis, corresponding to the theoretical framework of business administration and management, the order of the organisation corresponds to a structure of people directed and coordinated to achieve pre-established objectives. However, the effectiveness of a unit of order could be jeopardised in the event of a heterogenesis of goals, which could cause a rupture between the unity of order and the unity of origin. Following the principle of good order or *eunomia*, there cannot be a break between the means and ends of a business organisation (Melkevik, 2019), and the ends reside in the unity of origin. If the unit of order operates outside of the organic ends of every company, a divorce between means and ends occurs.

However, not every form of order within a company is valid, as there are many erroneous organisational forms; the reason being that not all agreements or rules that govern a company are valid for its proper functioning. Thus, not all agreements or rules are part of a *eunomia* or good law; not all orders are good (Melkevik, 2019). Pope Pius XI stated this in his encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, urging both entrepreneurs and workers to transform any unjust and competitive business order into one that allows for fairer wages, thereby supporting the family life of employees. Pius XI also proposed some criteria for such an organisation: family support, the company's situation, and the need for the common good. As can be inferred from Pius XI's proposition, the unit of order is subjected to the ends corresponding to the unity of origin, in other words, to the essence of the company as a community.

Politically, *eunomia* conditions the stability of the company, as stability depends on a good institutional order. The good order is not simply the fact that—given a broad agreement to achieve certain ends or the power of a dominant group to impose them—the company is organised efficiently and effectively to achieve them (Melkevik, 2019). Above all, the company, in its work, is an organisation that evolves and shares its environment with other human institutions. This is why it must promote organisational models that enhance human capabilities and contribute to a dignified and fulfilling life (Melkevik, 2019). In fact, the set of moral and civic norms (often inspired by religions) envelops all interactions between the different social bodies that compose nations or local and regional communities (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021).

Something that the company—in its organisation, arrangement, and adaptation of means to ends—cannot ignore is that the means and ends are inseparable in a corporation (Melkevik, 2019). For this reason, there cannot be a divorce between the unity of origin and the unity of order in business. Suppose the essence of all social life (and this includes business life) lies in the common good, as Christianity teaches (Herrán, 2021). In that case, the unity of order cannot stray from the unity of origin, where the nature of the ends of every human organisation resides. In this regard, while any unit of order can be governed by a set of communication and authority relationships, these do not determine the nature of the social order.

In contrast, Catholic doctrine, with its Christian vision of the common good, imbues social relationships with a transcendental character that is essential to the social nature of humanity (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021). The Christian vision of the common good helps the

company to organise itself based on the organisational principle of reciprocity, considered a fundamental principle of good order (Fuller et al., 2003). A reason for this is that it stimulates bilateral commitment between workers and the rest of the company members. Pope John XXIII, in his encyclical *Mater et magistra* (1961), called for the active participation of workers and cooperativism as necessary mechanisms for business operation to safeguard human dignity. In this sense, recognising workers as human beings is crucial for the effective management of human capacities (Omolawal, 2021). It can be deduced that the Catholic perspective on the common good of the company and its importance within the organisation is not only applicable to Catholics but also resonates with other social groups (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021). This is because the notion of the common good appeals to universal values such as solidarity, justice, and respect for human dignity, which transcend particular religious beliefs. In a business context, these principles can foster cooperation, strengthen trust among stakeholders, and promote long-term sustainability, making them relevant and beneficial across diverse cultural and ethical frameworks.

As mentioned earlier, the nature of any social order is given by its ends, not by the general technical objectives attributed to every company, or the specific ones of each organisation. The nature of the company is linked to the ultimate socio-economic purpose. The goals of survival, profits, and growth indeed apply to all companies. However, the ultimate reason lies in their social function to reward internal personnel and address the socio-economic needs of the communities it serves, as well as to contribute to the improvement of virtues in individuals. Therefore, to the extent that the objectives of the company become disconnected from its ultimate purpose, a divorce between the unit of order and the unit of origin occurs. Consequently, the common good suffers, which will jeopardise the general objectives inherent in any business organisation.

3.3 Unit of action

According to the social doctrine of the Church, action constitutes a voluntary activity that seeks a social or moral result (Argandoña, 2017). Therefore, much of human action is necessarily carried out in interaction with others. Due to the very nature of business activity, each individual is forced to combine their actions with those of others within the company. The Catholic principle of the common good helps identify the actions to be executed in order to achieve optimal results for the company (Zadroga, 2022); it is what enables the company to effectively become a unit of action.

Common action is a unifying form of sociability that is very common in companies (Melé, 2012). Moreover, the company, implies a joint action. It is true that people in the company participate in a common action, but that does not mean there is unity of action, because the personnel in a company may have very diverse motivations when performing their tasks. Thus, in a company, we can find utilitarian relationships based on mere individual convenience, as well as relationships of solidarity with a clear moral content (Melé, 2012).

Furthermore, it is essential to understand what causes joint action to determine the strength of that unity, as the cause of relationships among the company's members is one of the factors that either strengthens or weakens it (Melé, 2012). Such a dependence reveals that the unit of action rests on both the unit of order and the unit of origin. The reason is as follows: every human action has the general objective of moving from an initial situation to a better one (Argandoña, 2017), and the unit of origin determines the ultimate goal or final situation. In other words, it is the alignment in the main motivation that provides unity to the action (Argandoña, 2017).

If there are no shared goals in the unit of origin, the action that leads to the desired future situation is weakened. In fact, business economics theory tells us that without the alignment of goals, the effectiveness of the organisation in its tasks is compromised (Ricart, 2009). This occurs when there is dissonance between the unit of action and the unit of order, which must be addressed because it could jeopardise the competitiveness and survival of the company.

In this sense, the Catholic Church serves as a corporate example and a guide for how the actions of the people in an organisation must be directed towards a final goal (Calkins, 2000). In this context, John XXIII (1961) had already warned that the worker could not be a passive element in business management, while explicitly demanding active participation.

The pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* (which also demands the active participation of workers and other members) specifies that participation must be done appropriately, i.e., in proportion to the role each person plays in the company (Clarke et al., 2005). In this way, management unity is facilitated (Clarke et al., 2005).

According to John Paul II's (1993) thought on human activity in community, the active participation of workers is justified since decision-making affects the life of each member of the organisation, who must act with the necessary freedom to achieve their perfection (Espartinez, 2023). Based on this approach, workers should not only participate in the execution of business activities, but should also intervene in planning and organisation. This is how Catholic doctrine proposes the transition from the unit of order to the unit of action.

The unit of action in a company can be imposed from upper management or can be the result of aligning the goals of the human group with the natural purposes of the company, that is, the result of harmonising the unit of origin and the unit of order. The unit of order can impose a unit of action or harmonise with the unit of origin. Evidence in favour of this harmonisation is the demand for more complex working methods, which require not only professionalism but also education and integrity. Forms that are, in summary, considered significant for the common good and business improvement (Marek & Jabłoński, 2021).

The fundamental aspect for the company to achieve unity of action is for the principle of reciprocity to prevail within the organisation, or, in other words, for organisational relationships to be based on reciprocity. In any organisation, members are willing to commit to it when they perceive that the organisation is committed to them (Fuller et al., 2003; Gervasi et al., 2022). The same happens among co-workers, where a significant cause of reciprocity is the civic behaviour received. The principle of reciprocity is also studied in theology, and the Catholic Church has addressed its social importance, as Pope Francis exhorted in *Evangelii gaudium* (2013).

The Church has always taught that the pursuit of the common good fosters social reciprocity, a principle that St. Thomas Aquinas emphasised in the Middle Ages. Aquinas stated in his teaching that the common good arises from each person's primary desire to promote the good of others, which in turn produces the common good. The following explanation serves as a way to gain deeper insight into the above statement by Aquinas: Reciprocity between the members of the organisation and between them and society is perfectly compatible with the company obtaining profits (Brown, 2019), as the pursuit of profit is not incompatible with the political tradition of the common good in business.

Moreover, there are certain business and professional activities aimed at gaining profits for the company that foster reciprocity (Brown, 2019; Zózimo et al., 2023). Similarly, exchanges and contracts are not inherently good; they are part of the social life of men (Melé, 2012) and are valid tools for meeting common needs.

However, it is the company's assumption, as a society aligned with the common good, that produces a shared purpose. This ensures that the objectives of the organisation are understood as common because their achievement will benefit all members of the organisation. This is how cooperation is achieved to reach the established objectives through the commitment of all (Melé, 2012).

4. Conclusion

To achieve the common good of the company in accordance with Catholic social teaching, the organisation must be understood successively as a unit of origin, a unit of order, and a unit of action. The unit of origin (or its absence) determines the unit of order, which in turn is responsible for establishing the form of unity in action. The approach to the common good within the company directly shapes its development as a unit of origin, a unit of order, and a unit of action. Within the organisational context, the three units exist only when the company operates as a community, or a unifying whole, in which all components share a common purpose. As Pope John Paul II (1993) emphasises, unity generates community, not the other way around; community is realised solely through unifying relationships. Consequently, within the company, the unit of origin—where foundational unifying relationships emerge—facilitates the most appropriate unit of order, which subsequently reinforces the unity of action. Employees' sense of belonging is rooted in the relationships that constitute the community, a factor increasingly recognised by many organisations as vital (Melé, 2012).

In conclusion, the social doctrine of the Church offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the concept of the common good in the context of business. Catholic thought does not confine this understanding to the economic dimension of the company; it equally emphasises political and cultural dimensions. These are critical for the organisation's long-term sustainability, as well as for the development of its members. Moreover, this perspective considers the broader impact of the company on societies and communities, as well as the individuals within them. After all, the organisation must contribute to the integral development of people, both collectively and individually (Benedict XVI, 2009). In this way, Catholic social teaching offers a more expansive conception of the company as an organisation, facilitating the integration of both the general and the specific common good.

Although Catholic doctrine regarding the company's common good can serve as a valid guide for executives and managers (Frémeaux & Michelsen, 2017), a need remains for prudential application. Within this context, prudential application refers to the practical implementation of the Church's principles in organisational settings. From this perspective, it is advisable to develop further research addressing specific business challenges that affect the common good, thereby translating doctrinal insights into actionable managerial strategies.

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Author Contributions

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