

**COMPENDIUM  
OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE  
OF THE CHURCH**

Chapter Three: passages from the Document

**THE HUMAN PERSON AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

<p><b>I. SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND THE PERSONALIST PRINCIPLE</b></p>	<p>* <b>The Church sees in men and women, in every person, the living image of God himself.</b> This image finds, and must always find anew, an ever deeper and fuller unfolding of itself in the mystery of Christ, the Perfect Image of God, the One who reveals God to man and man to himself. <b>In Christ the Lord, the Church indicates and strives to be the first to embark upon the path of the human person[198], and she invites all people to recognize in everyone — near and far, known and unknown, and above all in the poor and the suffering — a brother or sister “for whom Christ died”</b> (1 Cor 8:11; Rom 14:15) ... (n 105).</p> <p>* All of social life is an expression of its unmistakable protagonist: the human person. <b>The origin of social life is therefore found in the human person, and society cannot refuse to recognize its active and responsible subject; every expression of society must be directed towards the human person ...</b> (n 106).</p> <p>* Men and women, in the concrete circumstances of history, represent the heart and soul of Catholic social thought. <b>The whole of the Church's social doctrine, in fact, develops from the principle that affirms the inviolable dignity of the human person ...</b> (n 107).</p>
<p><b>II. THE HUMAN PERSON AS THE “IMAGO DEI”</b></p> <p>a. <b>Creatures in the image of God</b></p>	<p>* The fundamental message of Sacred Scripture proclaims that the human person is a creature of God (cf. Ps 139:14-18), and sees in his being in the image of God the element that characterizes and distinguishes him: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). God places the human creature at the centre and summit of the created order. Man (in Hebrew, “<b>adam</b>”) is formed from the earth (“<b>adamah</b>”) and God blows into his nostrils the breath of life (cf. Gen 2:7). Therefore, “being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone.</p>

**He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. Further, he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead” ... (n 108).**

\* **The likeness with God shows that the essence and existence of man are constitutively related to God in the most profound manner.** The human being is a personal being created by God to be in relationship with him; man finds life and self-expression only in relationship, and tends naturally to God ... (n 109).

\* **The relationship between God and man is reflected in the relational and social dimension of human nature.** Man, in fact, is not a solitary being, but “a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential”. In this regard the fact that God created human beings as man and woman (cf. Gen 1:27) is significant ... (n 110).

\* **Man and woman have the same dignity and are of equal value,** not only because they are both, in their differences, created in the image of God, but even more profoundly because the dynamic of reciprocity that gives life to the “we” in the human couple, is an image of God. **In a relationship of mutual communion, man and woman fulfil themselves in a profound way, rediscovering themselves as persons through the sincere gift of themselves ... (n 111).**

\* **Man and woman are in relationship with others above all as those to whom the lives of others have been entrusted.** “For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning, ... I will require it ... of man [and] of every man's brother” (Gen 9:5), God tells Noah after the flood. In this perspective, the relationship with God requires that the life of man be considered sacred and inviolable. The fifth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex 20:13; Deut 5:17), has validity because God alone is Lord of life and death. **The respect owed to the inviolability and integrity of physical life finds its climax in the positive commandment: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev 19:18), by which Jesus enjoins the obligation to tend to the needs of one's neighbour (cf. Mt 22:37-40; Mk 12:29-31; Lk 10:27-28) ... (n 112).**

\* **With this specific vocation to life, man and woman find themselves also in the presence of all the other creatures.** They can and are obliged to put them at their own service and to enjoy them, but their dominion over the world requires the exercise of responsibility, it is not a freedom of arbitrary and selfish exploitation. **All of creation in fact has value and is “good” (cf. Gen 1:4,10,12,18,21,25) in the sight of God, who is its author. Man must discover and respect its value ... (n 113).**

\* **Man is also in relationship with himself and is able to reflect on himself.** Sacred Scripture speaks in this regard about the heart of man. **The heart designates man's inner spirituality, what distinguishes him from every other creature. In the end, the heart indicates the spiritual faculties which most properly belong to man, which are his prerogatives**

<p>b. The tragedy of sin</p>	<p><b>insofar as he is created in the image of his Creator: reason, the discernment of good and evil, free will.</b> When he listens to the deep aspirations of his heart, no person can fail to make his own the words of truth expressed by Saint Augustine: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you” ... (n 114).</p> <p>* <b>This marvellous vision of man's creation by God is inseparable from the tragic appearance of original sin.</b> With a clear affirmation the Apostle Paul sums up the account of man's fall contained in the first pages of the Bible: “Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin” (Rom 5:12). It is a sin of disobedience (cf. <i>Rom</i> 5:19) that separates man from God.</p> <p><b>From revelation we know that Adam, the first man, transgresses God's commandment and loses the holiness and justice in which he was made, holiness and justice which were received not only for himself but for all of humanity ... (n 115).</b></p> <p>* <b>At the root of personal and social divisions, which in differing degrees offend the value and dignity of the human person, there is a wound which is present in man's inmost self. The consequences of sin, insofar as it is an act of separation from God, are alienation, that is, the separation of man not only from God but also from himself, from other men and from the world around him ... (n 116).</b></p> <p>* <b>The mystery of sin is composed of a twofold wound, which the sinner opens in his own side and in the relationship with his neighbour.</b> That is why we can speak of <b>personal and social sin</b>. Every sin is personal under a certain aspect; under another, every sin is social, insofar as and because it also has social consequences. <b>In its true sense, sin is always an act of the person, because it is the free act of an individual person and not properly speaking of a group or community. The character of social sin can unquestionably be ascribed to every sin, taking into account the fact that “by virtue of human solidarity which is as mysterious and intangible as it is real and concrete, each individual's sin in some way affects others”.</b> At the bottom of every situation of sin there is always the <b>individual who sins ... (n 117).</b></p> <p>* Certain sins, moreover, constitute by their very object a direct assault on one's neighbour. Such sins in particular are known as social sins. <b>Social sin is every sin committed against the justice due in relations between individuals, between the individual and the community, and also between the community and the individual. Social too is every sin against the rights of the human person, starting with the right to life, including that of life in the womb, and every sin against the physical integrity of the individual; every sin against the freedom of others, especially against the supreme freedom to believe in God and worship him; and every sin against the dignity and honour of one's neighbour. Every sin against the common good and its demands, in the whole broad area of rights and duties of citizens, is also social sin. In the end, social sin is that sin that “refers to the relationships between the various</b></p>
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<p>c. <b>The universality of sin and the universality of salvation</b></p>	<p><b>human communities. These relationships are not always in accordance with the plan of God, who intends that there be justice in the world and freedom and peace between individuals, groups and peoples” ... (n 118).</b></p> <p><b>* The consequences of sin perpetuate the structures of sin. These are rooted in personal sin and, therefore, are always connected to concrete acts of the individuals who commit them, consolidate them and make it difficult to remove them.</b> The actions and attitudes opposed to the will of God and the good of neighbour, as well as the structures arising from such behaviour, appear to fall into two categories today: “on the one hand, the all-consuming desire for profit, and on the other, the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one's will upon others. In order to characterize better each of these attitudes, one can add the expression: ‘at any price” ... (n 119).</p> <p><b>* The doctrine of original sin, which teaches the universality of sin, has an important foundation:</b> “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (<i>1 Jn 1:8</i>). This doctrine encourages men and women not to remain in guilt and not to take guilt lightly, continuously seeking scapegoats in other people and justification in the environment, in heredity, in institutions, in structures and in relationships. <b>This is a teaching that unmasks such deceptions.</b></p> <p><b>The doctrine of the universality of sin, however, must not be separated from the consciousness of the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ.</b> If it is so separated it engenders a false anxiety of sin and a pessimistic view of the world and life, which leads to contempt of the cultural and civil accomplishments of mankind ... (n 120).</p> <p><b>* Christian realism sees the abysses of sin, but in the light of the hope, greater than any evil, given by Jesus Christ's act of redemption, in which sin and death are destroyed (cf. Rom 5:18-21; 1 Cor 15:56-57) ... (n 121).</b></p> <p><b>* The new reality that Jesus Christ gives us is not grafted onto human nature</b> nor is it added from outside: it is rather that reality of communion with the Trinitarian God to which men and women have always been oriented in the depths of their being, thanks to their creaturely likeness to God. But this is also a reality that people cannot attain by their own forces alone. <b>Through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, in whom this reality of communion has already been brought about in a singular manner, men and women are received as children of God (cf. Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-7) ... (n 122).</b></p> <p><b>* The universality of this hope also includes, besides the men and women of all peoples, heaven and earth ... (n 123).</b></p>
<p><b>III. THE MANY ASPECTS OF THE</b></p>	<p><b>* Prizing highly the marvellous biblical message, the Church's social doctrine stops to dwell above all on the principal and indispensable</b></p>

<p><b>HUMAN PERSON</b></p>	<p><b>dimensions of the human person. Thus it is able to grasp the most significant facets of the mystery and dignity of human beings ... (n 124).</b></p> <p>* <b>The human person may never be thought of only as an absolute individual being</b>, built up by himself and on himself, as if his characteristic traits depended on no one else but himself. Nor can the person be thought of as a mere cell of an organism that is inclined at most to grant it recognition in its functional role within the overall system ...The Church is taking care to proclaim instead that <b>“individuals do not feel themselves isolated units, like grains of sand, but united by the very force of their nature and by their internal destiny, into an organic, harmonious mutual relationship”</b> ... (n 125).</p> <p>* Christian faith, while inviting that whatever is good and worthy of man should be sought out wherever it may be found (cf. 1 Thes 5:21), “is above and is sometimes opposed to the ideologies, in that it recognizes God, who is transcendent and the Creator, and who, through all the levels of creation, calls on man as endowed with responsibility and freedom”.</p> <p><b>The Church's social doctrine strives to indicate the different dimensions of the mystery of man, who must be approached “in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and also of his community and social being”, with special attention so that the value of the human person may be readily perceived ... (n 126).</b></p>
<p><b>A. THE UNITY OF THE PERSON</b></p>	<p>* <b>Man was created by God in unity of body and soul. “The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole — corpore et anima unus — as a person.</b> The person, including the body, is completely entrusted to himself, and it is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts” ... (n 127).</p> <p>* <b>Through his corporeality man unites in himself elements of the material world; these “reach their summit through him, and through him raise their voice in free praise of the Creator”.</b> This dimension makes it possible for man to be part of the material world, but not as in a prison or in exile. It is not proper to despise bodily life; rather “man ... is obliged to regard his body as good and honourable since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day”.</p> <p>Through his spirituality man moves beyond the realm of mere things and plunges into the innermost structure of reality. <b>When he enters into his own heart, that is, when he reflects on his destiny, he discovers that he is superior to the material world because of his unique dignity as one who converses with God, under whose gaze he makes decisions about his life ... (n 128).</b></p> <p>* Therefore, man has two different characteristics: he is a material being, linked to this world by his body, and he is a spiritual being, open to transcendence. The Church affirms: <b>“The unity of soul and body is so</b></p>





contrary is the case, freedom dies, destroying man and society ... (n 138).

\* **The truth concerning good and evil is recognized in a practical and concrete manner by the judgment of conscience, which leads to the acceptance of responsibility for the good accomplished and the evil committed.** “Consequently in the practical judgment of conscience, which imposes on the person the obligation to perform a given act, **the link between freedom and truth** is made manifest. Precisely for this reason conscience expresses itself in acts of ‘judgment’ which reflect the truth about the good, and not in arbitrary ‘decisions’ ... (n 139).

\* The exercise of freedom implies a reference to a natural moral law, of a universal character, that precedes and unites all rights and duties. **The natural law “is nothing other than the light of intellect infused within us by God. Thanks to this, we know what must be done and what must be avoided. This light or this law has been given by God to creation”. It consists in the participation in his eternal law, which is identified with God himself.** This law is called “natural” because the reason that promulgates it is proper to human nature. **It is universal, it extends to all people insofar as it is established by reason.** In its principal precepts, the divine and natural law is presented in the **Decalogue and indicates the primary and essential norms regulating moral life.** Its central focus is the act of aspiring and submitting to God, the source and judge of everything that is good, and also the act of seeing others as equal to oneself. **The natural law expresses the dignity of the person and lays the foundations of the person's fundamental duties ... (n 140).**

\* **In the diversity of cultures, the natural law unites peoples, enjoining common principles.** Although its application may require adaptations to the many different conditions of life according to place, time and circumstances, it remains **immutable. The natural law offers a foundation prepared by God for the revealed law and Grace, in full harmony with the work of the Spirit ... (n 141).**

\* The natural law, which is the law of God, cannot be annulled by human sinfulness. **It lays the indispensable moral foundation for building the human community and for establishing the civil law** that draws its consequences of a concrete and contingent nature from the principles of the natural law ... (n 142).

\* Freedom mysteriously tends to betray the openness to truth and human goodness, and too often it prefers evil and being selfishly closed off, raising itself to the status of a divinity that creates good and evil. **Human freedom needs therefore to be liberated. Christ, by the power of his Paschal Mystery, frees man from his disordered love of self, which is the source of his contempt for his neighbour and of those relationships marked by domination of others.** Christ shows us that freedom attains its fulfilment in the gift of self. By his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus places man once more in communion with God and his neighbour ... (n 143).

**D. THE EQUAL  
DIGNITY OF ALL  
PEOPLE**

\* **“God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34; cf. Rom 2:11; Gal 2:6; Eph 6:9), since all people have the same dignity as creatures made in his image and likeness.** The Incarnation of the Son of God shows the equality of all people with regard to dignity: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28; cf. Rom 10:12; 1 Cor 12:13, Col 3:11).

Since something of the glory of God shines on the face of every person, the dignity of every person before God is the basis of the dignity of man before other men. **Moreover, this is the ultimate foundation of the radical equality and brotherhood among all people, regardless of their race, nation, sex, origin, culture, or class ... (n 144).**

\* **Only the recognition of human dignity can make possible the common and personal growth of everyone (cf. Jas 2:1-9).** To stimulate this kind of growth it is necessary in particular to help the least, effectively ensuring conditions of equal opportunity for men and women and guaranteeing an objective equality between the different social classes before the law.

**Also in relations between peoples and States, conditions of equality and parity are prerequisites for the authentic progress of the international community.** Despite the steps taken in this direction, it must not forget that there still exist many inequalities and forms of dependence.

Together with equality in the recognition of the dignity of each person and of every people there must also be an awareness that it will be possible to safeguard and promote human dignity only if this is done as a community, by the whole of humanity ... (n 145).

\* **“Male” and “female” differentiate two individuals of equal dignity, which does not however reflect a static equality, because the specificity of the female is different from the specificity of the male, and this difference in equality is enriching and indispensable for the harmony of life in society ... (n 146),**

\* **Woman is the complement of man, as man is the complement of woman: man and woman complete each other mutually,** not only from a physical and psychological point of view, but also ontologically. It is only because of the duality of “male” and “female” that the “human” being becomes a full reality ... (n 147).

\* **Persons with disabilities are fully human subjects, with rights and duties:** “in spite of the limitations and sufferings affecting their bodies and faculties, they point up more clearly the dignity and greatness of man”. Since persons with disabilities are subjects with all their rights, **they are to be helped to participate in every dimension of family and social life at every level accessible to them and according to their possibilities ... The rights of persons with disabilities need to be promoted with effective and appropriate measures:** “It would be radically unworthy of man, and a denial of our common humanity, to admit to the life of the community, and

	<p>thus admit to work, only those who are fully functional. To do so would be to practise a serious form of discrimination, that of the strong and healthy against the weak and sick” ... (n 148).</p>
<p><b>E. THE SOCIAL NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS</b></p>	<p>* The human person is essentially a social being because God, who created humanity, willed it so. Human nature, in fact, reveals itself as a nature of a being who responds to his own needs. This is based on a relational subjectivity. <b>A society is a group of persons bound together organically by a principle of unity that goes beyond each one of them. ... It is therefore necessary to stress that community life is a natural characteristic that distinguishes man from the rest of earthly creatures.</b> “God did not create man as a ‘solitary being’ but wished him to be a ‘social being’. Social life therefore is not exterior to man: <b>he can only grow and realize his vocation in relation with others</b>” ... (n 149).</p> <p>* <b>The social nature of human beings does not automatically lead to communion among persons, to the gift of self.</b> Because of pride and selfishness, man discovers in himself the seeds of asocial behaviour, impulses leading him to close himself within his own individuality and to dominate his neighbour. Every society worthy of the name can be sure that it stands in the truth when all of its members, thanks to their ability to know what is good, are able to pursue it for themselves and for others. <b>It is out of love for one's own good and for that of others that people come together in stable groups with the purpose of attaining a common good.</b> The different human societies also must establish among themselves relationships of solidarity, communication and cooperation, in the service of man and the common good ... (n 150).</p> <p>* <b>The social nature of human beings is not uniform but is expressed in many different ways. In fact, the common good depends on a healthy social pluralism.</b> The different components of society are called to build a unified and harmonious whole, within which it is possible for each element to preserve and develop its own characteristics and autonomy. Some components — such as the family, the civil community and the religious community — respond more immediately to the intimate nature of man, while others come about more on a voluntary basis ... (n 151)</p>
<p><b>IV. HUMAN RIGHTS</b></p> <p>a. <b>The value of human rights</b></p>	<p>* <b>The movement towards the identification and proclamation of human rights is one of the most significant attempts to respond effectively to the inescapable demands of human dignity.</b> The Church sees in these rights the extraordinary opportunity that our modern times offer, through the affirmation of these rights, for more effectively recognizing human dignity and universally promoting it as a characteristic inscribed by God the Creator in his creature. The Church's Magisterium has not failed to note the positive value of the <b>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</b>, adopted by the United Nations on 10 December 1948, which Pope John Paul II defined as “a true milestone on the path of humanity's moral progress” ... (n 152).</p> <p>* In fact, the roots of human rights are to be found in the dignity that</p>

	<p>belongs to each human being.</p> <p><b>The ultimate source of human rights is not found in the mere will of human beings, in the reality of the State, in public powers, but in man himself and in God his Creator. These rights are “universal, inviolable, inalienable”. Universal</b> because they are present in all human beings, without exception of time, place or subject. <b>Inviolable</b> insofar as “they are inherent in the human person and in human dignity” and because “it would be vain to proclaim rights, if at the same time everything were not done to ensure the duty of respecting them by all people, everywhere, and for all people”. <b>Inalienable</b> insofar as “no one can legitimately deprive another person, whoever they may be, of these rights, since this would do violence to their nature” ... (n 153).</p> <p><b>* Human rights are to be defended not only individually but also as a whole: protecting them only partially would imply a kind of failure to recognize them.</b> They correspond to the demands of human dignity and entail, in the first place, the fulfilment of the essential needs of the person in the material and spiritual spheres. “These rights apply to every stage of life and to every political, social, economic and cultural situation. Together they form a single whole, directed unambiguously towards the promotion of every aspect of the good of both the person and society ... <b>The integral promotion of every category of human rights is the true guarantee of full respect for each individual right”.</b> <b>Universality and indivisibility are distinctive characteristics of human rights</b> ... (n 154).</p>
<p><b>b. The specification of rights</b></p>	<p><i>* The teachings of Pope John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council, and Pope Paul VI</i> have given abundant indication of the concept of human rights as articulated by the Magisterium. Pope John Paul II has drawn up a list of them in the Encyclical <b>Centesimus Annus</b>: “<b>the right to life</b>, an integral part of which is the right of the child to develop in the mother's womb from the moment of conception; <b>the right to live in a united family</b> and in a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child's personality; <b>the right to develop one's intelligence and freedom</b> in seeking and knowing the <i>truth</i>; <b>the right to share in the work</b> which makes wise use of the earth's material resources, and to derive from that work the means to support oneself and one's dependents; and <b>the right freely to establish a family</b>, to have and to rear children through the responsible exercise of one's sexuality. In a certain sense, the source and synthesis of these rights is <b>religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in conformity with one's transcendent dignity as a person.</b>”</p> <p><b>The first right presented in this list is the right to life, from conception to its natural end, which is the condition for the exercise of all other rights and, in particular, implies the illicitness of every form of procured abortion and of euthanasia. Emphasis is given to the paramount value of the right to religious freedom</b> ... (n 155).</p>
<p><b>c. Rights and</b></p>	<p><i>* Inextricably connected to the topic of rights is the issue of the duties falling to men and women, which is given appropriate emphasis in the interventions of the Magisterium. <b>The mutual complementarities between</b></i></p>

<p>duties</p>	<p><b>rights and duties — they are indissolubly linked — are recalled several times, above all in the human person who possesses them.</b> This bond also has a social dimension: <b>“in human society to one man's right there corresponds a duty in all other persons: the duty, namely, of acknowledging and respecting the right in question”</b>. The Magisterium underlines the contradiction inherent in affirming rights without acknowledging corresponding responsibilities. “Those, therefore, who claim their own rights, yet altogether forget or neglect to carry out their respective duties, are people who build with one hand and destroy with the other” ... (n 156).</p>
<p>d. <b>Rights of peoples and nations</b></p>	<p>* <b>The field of human rights has expanded to include the rights of peoples and nations:</b> in fact, “what is true for the individual is also true for peoples”.<sup>[326]</sup> The Magisterium points out that <b>international law</b> “rests upon the principle of equal respect for States, for each people's right to self-determination and for their free cooperation in view of the higher common good of humanity”. <b>Peace is founded not only on respect for human rights but also on respect for the rights of peoples, in particular the right to independence.</b></p> <p><b>The rights of nations</b> are nothing but “‘human rights' fostered at the specific level of community life”. <b>A nation has a “fundamental right to existence”, to “its own language and culture,</b> through which a people expresses and promotes ... its fundamental spiritual ‘sovereignty’”, to “shape its life according to its own traditions, excluding, of course, every abuse of basic human rights and in particular the oppression of minorities”, to “build its future by providing an appropriate education for the younger generation”. <b>The international order requires a balance between particularity and universality,</b> which all nations are called to bring about, for their primary duty is to live in a posture of peace, respect and solidarity with other nations ... (n 157).</p>
<p>e. <b>Filling in the gap between the letter and the spirit</b></p>	<p>* <b>The solemn proclamation of human rights is contradicted by a painful reality of violations, wars and violence of every kind, in the first place, genocides and mass deportations, the spreading on a virtual worldwide dimension of ever new forms of slavery such as trafficking in human beings, child soldiers, the exploitation of workers, illegal drug trafficking, prostitution.</b> “Even in countries with democratic forms of government, these rights are not always fully respected”.</p> <p><b>Unfortunately, there is a gap between the “letter” and the “spirit” of human rights,</b> which can often be attributed to a merely formal recognition of these rights. The Church's social doctrine, in consideration of the privilege accorded by the Gospel to the poor, repeats over and over that “the more fortunate should <b>renounce</b> some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others” and that an excessive affirmation of equality “can give rise to an individualism in which each one claims his own rights without wishing to be answerable for the common good” ... (n 158).</p> <p>* <b>The Church, aware that her essentially religious mission includes the defence and promotion of human rights,</b> “holds in high esteem the</p>

	<p>dynamic approach of today which is everywhere fostering these rights”. This pastoral commitment develops in a twofold direction: in the proclamation of the Christian foundations of human rights and in the denunciation of the violations of these rights. In any event, “<i>proclamation</i> is always more important than <i>denunciation</i>, and the latter cannot ignore the former, which gives it true solidity and the force of higher motivation”. For greater effectiveness, this commitment is open to ecumenical cooperation, to dialogue with other religions, to all appropriate contacts with other organizations, governmental and non-governmental, at the national and international levels. The Church trusts above all in the help of the Lord and his Spirit who, poured forth into human hearts, is the surest guarantee for respecting justice and human rights, and for contributing to peace. <b>“The promotion of justice and peace and the penetration of all spheres of human society with the light and the leaven of the Gospel have always been the object of the Church's efforts in fulfilment of the Lord's command”</b> ... (n 159).</p>
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# Charismatic Reflection

## THE SPIRIT OF LOVE IN JESUS CHRIST

Jesus expresses His love for the Father in terms of obedience:

**“I love the Father and do as the Father has commanded me.”** Jn 14:31

No love can be credible or trusted if it is not shown in the sacrifice of one’s own free will. The degree of obedience measures, in fact, the degree of love.

Magdalene perceives this interior attitude of availability in Christ Jesus. In the Word Incarnate, love for humanity is the natural outcome of that very love the Father has for His Son.

**“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.”** Jn 15:9

And to know how Christ loves us, it is enough to contemplate Him hanging on the Cross:

**“Greater love has no man than this,  
that a man lays down his life for his friends.”** Jn 15:13

The Crucified One is the visible revelation of the love of the Father for all humanity and for each one in particular. In the Crucified One, Magdalene grasps not only the spirit that animates Him, but also the interior attitude as well as the heart overflowing with love that He pours into hers, made new and filled by the Holy Spirit.

Magdalene is a woman thirsting for love and love is the first value in her relationship with God. But the force of such an intuition is a gift. There can be no intuition of love in self, nor an act of faith in God who is love, unless the grace of the Father is first present. “Charity and Faith”, says St Paul, “come from God the Father.” cf Eph 6:23

And God the Father gives us this grace through the Word made flesh:

**“Love is in Jesus Christ.”** 2 Tm 1:13

Magdalene fixes her eagle gaze on the person of Christ, the God-Man, and sees in Him the infinite power of the love of the Father. For her, the spirit of love is not only in Jesus Christ, but

**“The spirit of love is the spirit of Jesus Christ.”**

“I will send the Holy Spirit to you”: Jesus tells his disciples:

**“He ... will take from what is mine and give it to you.”** Jn 16:14

And Magdalene opens her heart completely to the invasion of the spirit of Christ, who is the Spirit of infinite Love:

**The Spirit of love in Magdalene is that of Jesus Christ and it is also that  
which must be visible in us, Daughters and Sons of Charity,  
who belong to the Canossian Family.**

**“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him.”** Rm 8:9

## 2. MARY, MOTHER OF SORROWS, MOTHER OF CHARITY, MOTHER OF ALL GOD'S CREATURES

Magdalene perceived in Mary

**the One in Whom the love of Jesus Crucified found acceptance in its fullest form.**

The Daughters and Sons of Charity are called to learn from her how to be totally open to the Lord's Love.

By the gift of the Spirit and in communion of the Saints, **Mary is an example of maternity, a maternity that is clearly apostolic:**

**Mary, at the foot of the Cross, participates in the struggle against evil,  
and in the commitment to accept unconditionally anyone  
marked by the wounds of sin.**

**Mary is "constituted Mother of Charity at the foot of the Cross when,  
at the words of her dying Divine Son, she gathered all of us,  
even though sinners, in her heart." UR, Preface**

Since maternity is a way of participating in the passion of Jesus for the redemption of sinners, Magdalene finds a specific way of practising this maternity in the Foundation of the Daughters of Charity ... and the Institution of the Tertiaries... they are dedicated to serve the poor who are deprived of education, instruction and assistance, **as a result of sin**. In Magdalene's view, developing this maternal spirit implies the readiness to labour and suffer, so that every man or woman may become aware **of being a son or daughter of God**.

***Don't be afraid,  
let us try to work with all our heart for the good of souls  
and for Divine Glory.***

***May God enable us,  
during this short time He leaves us on earth,  
to serve Him more and more.***

***God's mercy and what He does for us is so wonderful  
that even if we were  
to become dust, to serve God,  
this would be nothing in comparison with  
what is our duty.***

*Magdalene of Canossa*

# CELEBRATION

## How wonderful is your name, O Lord!

We, human beings, are at the centre of the Universe and we are more important than the sun and the galaxies! Our value is greater than these because God created us in His image and likeness. (Genesis 1:26)

If we were to travel with the astronauts, the vision of the cosmos would make us feel so small.

This feeling of smallness and at the same time of greatness would make us exclaim to the psalmist and to us:

"What is man that You should spare a thought for him,  
the son of man that you should care for him?" (Ps 8:4)

God always keeps us present in His heart.

Let us reflect on Psalm 8:

- Do I open myself to the wonder of being at the centre of God's care, to the marvel of seeing myself as His creature?
- Do I thank Him and praise Him with joy, because He made me as I am?
- Do I take on the responsibility of loving and caring for our planet?
- Do I ask Him to use my freedom well in order to develop my gifts in action, trying to be always more and more "in the image" of God?

## PSALM 8

O LORD, our God, / how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory / above the heavens.

From the lips of children and infants / you have ordained praise  
because of your enemies, / to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, / the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars, / which you have set in place,  
what is man that you are mindful of him, / the son of man that you care for him?

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings / and crowned him with glory and honour.  
You made him ruler over the works of your hands; / you put everything under his feet:  
all flocks and herds, / and the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, / and the fish of the sea,  
all that swim the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our God,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

## Personal and Group Reflection

**1. Read with attention and care** the First Chapter of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church or the above passages of the same Document.

**2. Reflect personally and with your Group of the Lay Canossians**, underlining the main interesting points.

**3.** The Compendium of Social Doctrine in chapter 3 defines the Human person and his/her rights. The human person, created in God's image, is the protagonist of all social life. There are two questions for reflection on this topic:

- In my daily life do I recognise in everyone, near or far, known or unknown, and above all in the poor and suffering, a brother or a sister for whom Christ died?
- Do I feel the urgency of discovering new and generous gestures of acceptance, caring attention, service, sharing and forgiveness? In my family, at work, in community, in my group of Lay Canossians, is there the possibility of showing more authentic and concrete gestures of charity: do I try to find them?

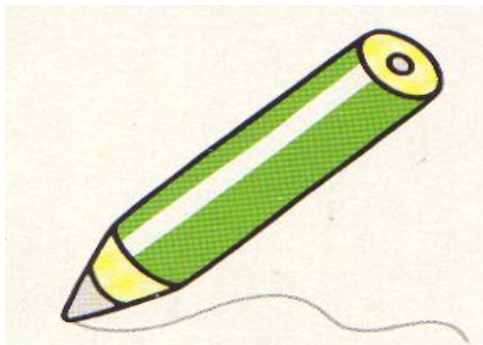
**4.** Human rights in this chapter are defined as "universal, inviolable and inalienable."

- Do I commit myself to respect, to defend and to promote the rights of every person? Am I courageous in accepting the challenges posed by new problems of the biological, medical, bioethical sciences? Do I dedicate some of my free time to keep myself up-dated, so as to make more efficacious the promotion of human life and its rights in the Church?
- Does freedom allow man to change the state of things around him, or does he determine the development of his/her person through choices that correspond to true good: am I free? Am I free from the thirst for power over things and people? Am I free from conditioning, my prejudices, hate and grudges? Sono libero dalla sete di potere sulle cose, sulle persone?

5. Try to enter your inner self, to discover your deepest aspirations, your social responsibilities.

**Meet with Jesus Christ:** the Son in Whom you are the son, a brother/sister for others.

6. Please, send to the Lay Canossian International Coordinating Team your reflections that help to implement our actions. We will share them with all our Lay Canossians for greater commitment and solidarity towards a civilization of love.



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