

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

SECOND PART

Chapter Eight: passages from the Document

THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY

<p>I. BIBLICAL ASPECTS</p> <p>a. God's dominion</p>	<p>* <i>At the beginning of its history, the people of Israel are unlike other peoples in that they have no king, for they recognize the dominion of Yahweh alone. It is God who intervenes on Israel's behalf through charismatic individuals, as recorded in the Book of Judges. The people approach the last of these individuals, Samuel, prophet and judge, to ask for a king (cf. 1 Sam 8:5; 10:18-19). Samuel warns the Israelites about the consequences of a despotic exercise of kingship (cf. 1 Sam 8:11-18). However, the authority of the king can also be experienced as a gift of Yahweh who comes to the assistance of his people (cf. 1 Sam 9:16). In the end, Saul is anointed king (cf. 1 Sam 10:1-2). These events show the tension that brought Israel to understand kingship in a different way than it was understood by neighbouring peoples. The king, chosen by Yahweh (cf. Dt 17:15; 1 Sam 9:16) and consecrated by him (cf. 1 Sam 16:12-13), is seen as God's son (cf. Ps 2:7) and is to make God's dominion and plan of salvation visible (cf. Ps 72). The king, then, is to be the defender of the weak and the guarantor of justice for the people. The denunciations of the prophets focus precisely on the kings' failure to fulfil these functions (cf. 1 Kg 21; Is 10:1-4; Am 2:6-8, 8:4-8; Mic 3:1-4). (377)</i></p> <p>* The prototype of the king chosen by Yahweh is David, whose humble origins are a favourite topic of the biblical account (cf. 1 Sam 16:1-13). David is the recipient of the promise (cf. 2 Sam 7:13-16; Ps 89:2-38, 132:11-18), which places him at the beginning of a special kingly tradition, the “messianic” tradition. Notwithstanding all the sins and infidelities of David and his successors, this tradition culminates in Jesus Christ, who is par excellence “Yahweh's anointed” (that is, “the Lord's consecrated one”, cf. 1 Sam 2:35, 24:7,11, 26:9,16; Ex 30:22-32), the son of David (cf. Mt 1:1-17; Lk 3:23-38; Rom 1:3).</p> <p><i>The failure of kingship on the historical level does not lead to the disappearance of the ideal of a king who, in fidelity to Yahweh, will govern with wisdom and act in justice. This hope reappears time and</i></p>
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<p>b. Jesus and political authority</p>	<p>again in the Psalms (cf. <i>Ps</i> 2, 18, 20, 21, 72). (378)</p> <p><i>* Jesus refuses the oppressive and despotic power wielded by the rulers of the nations (cf. Mk 10:42) and rejects their pretension in having themselves called benefactors (cf. Lk 22:25), but he does not directly oppose the authorities of his time.</i> In his pronouncement on the paying of taxes to Caesar (cf. <i>Mk</i> 12:13-17; <i>Mt</i> 22:15-22; <i>Lk</i> 20:20-26), he affirms that we must give to God what is God's, implicitly condemning every attempt at making temporal power divine or absolute: God alone can demand everything from man. At the same time, temporal power has the right to its due: Jesus does not consider it unjust to pay taxes to Caesar.</p> <p><i>Jesus, the promised Messiah, fought against and overcame the temptation of a political messianism, characterized by the subjection of the nations (cf. Mt 4:8-11; Lk 4:5-8). He is the Son of Man who came “to serve, and to give his life” (Mk 10:45; cf. Mt 20:24-28; Lk 22:24-27).</i> As his disciples are discussing with one another who is the greatest, Jesus teaches them that they must make themselves least and the servants of all (cf. <i>Mk</i> 9:33- 35), showing to the sons of Zebedee, James and John, who wish to sit at His right hand, the path of the cross (cf. <i>Mk</i> 10:35-40; <i>Mt</i> 20:20-23). (379)</p>
<p>c. The early Christian communities</p>	<p><i>* Submission, not passive but “for the sake of conscience” (Rom 13:5), to legitimate authority responds to the order established by God. Saint Paul defines the relationships and duties that a Christian is to have towards the authorities (cf. Rom 13:1-7).</i> He insists on the civic duty to pay taxes: “Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, fear to whom fear is due, respect to who respect is due” (<i>Rom</i> 13:7). The Apostle certainly does not intend to legitimize every authority so much as to help Christians to “take thought for what is noble in the sight of all” (<i>Rom</i> 12:17), including their relations with the authorities, insofar as the authorities are at the service of God for the good of the person (cf. <i>Rom</i> 13:4; <i>1 Tim</i> 2:1-2; <i>Tit</i> 3:1) and “to execute [God's] wrath on the wrongdoer” (<i>Rom</i> 13:4).</p> <p>Saint Peter exhorts Christians to “be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution” (1 Pet 2:13). The king and his governors have the duty “to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right” (<i>1 Pet</i> 2:14). This authority of theirs must be “honoured” (<i>1 Pet</i> 2: 17), that is, recognized, because God demands correct behaviour that will “silence the ignorance of foolish men” (<i>1 Pet</i> 2:15). Freedom must not be used as a pretext for evil but to serve God (cf. <i>1 Pet</i> 2:16). It concerns free and responsible obedience to an authority that causes justice to be respected, ensuring the common good. (380)</p> <p><i>* Praying for rulers, which Saint Paul recommended even as he was being persecuted, implicitly indicates what political authority ought to guarantee: a calm and tranquil life led with piety and</i></p>

	<p><i>dignity</i> (cf. <i>1 Tim</i> 2:1-2). Christians must “be ready for any honest work” (<i>Tit</i> 3:1), showing “perfect courtesy towards all” (<i>Tit</i> 3:2), in the awareness that they are saved not by their own deeds but by God’s mercy. (381)</p> <p>* When human authority goes beyond the limits willed by God, it makes itself a deity and demands absolute submission; it becomes the Beast of the Apocalypse, an image of the power of the imperial persecutor “drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev 17:6). (382)</p> <p><i>* The Church proclaims that Christ, the conqueror of death, reigns over the universe that he himself has redeemed. His kingdom includes even the present times and will end only when everything is handed over to the Father and human history is brought to completion in the final judgment (cf. 1 Cor 15:20-28). Christ reveals to human authority, always tempted by the desire to dominate, its authentic and complete meaning as service. God is the one Father, and Christ the one Teacher, of all mankind, and all people are brothers and sisters. Sovereignty belongs to God.</i> The Lord, however, “has not willed to reserve to himself all exercise of power. He entrusts to every creature the functions it is capable of performing, according to the capacities of its own nature. This mode of governance ought to be followed in social life. The way God acts in governing the world, which bears witness to such great regard for human freedom, should inspire the wisdom of those who govern human communities. They should behave as ministers of divine providence.” (383)</p>
<p>II. FOUNDATION AND PURPOSE OF THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY</p> <p>a. Political community, the human person and a people</p>	<p><i>The human person is the foundation and purpose of political life. Endowed with a rational nature, the human person is responsible for his own choices and able to pursue projects that give meaning to life at the individual and social level.</i> Being open both to the Transcendent and to others is his characteristic and distinguishing trait. Only in relation to the Transcendent and to others does the human person reach the total and complete fulfilment of himself. This means that for the human person, a naturally social and political being, “social life is not something added on” but is part of an essential and indelible dimension.</p> <p><i>The political community originates in the nature of persons, whose conscience “reveals to them and enjoins them to obey” the order which God has imprinted in all his creatures: “a moral and religious order; and it is this order — and not considerations of a purely extraneous, material order — which has the greatest validity in the solution of problems relating to their lives as individuals and as members of society, and problems concerning individual States and their interrelations”. This order must be gradually discovered and developed by humanity. The political community, a reality inherent in mankind, exists to achieve an end otherwise unobtainable: the full</i></p>

	<p>growth of each of its members, called to cooperate steadfastly for the attainment of the common good, under the impulse of their natural inclinations towards what is true and good. (384)</p> <p>* <i>The political community finds its authentic dimension in its reference to people: “it is and should in practice be the organic and organizing unity of a real people”.</i> The term “a people” does not mean a shapeless multitude, an inert mass to be manipulated and exploited, but a group of persons, each of whom — “at his proper place and in his own way”— is able to form its own opinion on public matters and has the freedom to express its own political sentiments and to bring them to bear positively on the common good. (385)</p> <p>* <i>The primary characteristic of a people is the sharing of life and values, which is the source of communion on the spiritual and moral level.</i> (386)</p> <p>* For every people there is in general a corresponding nation, but for various reasons national boundaries do not always coincide with ethnic boundaries. Thus the question of minorities arises, which has historically been the cause of more than just a few conflicts. The Magisterium affirms that minorities constitute groups with precise rights and duties. Moreover, minorities have the right to maintain their culture, including their language, and to maintain their religious beliefs, including worship services. In every case, recourse to terrorism is unjustifiable and damages the cause that is being sought. Minorities are also bound by duties, among which, above all, is working for the common good of the State in which they live. (387)</p>
<p>b. Defending and promoting human rights</p>	<p>* <i>Considering the human person as the foundation and purpose of the political community means in the first place working to recognize and respect human dignity through defending and promoting fundamental and inalienable human rights:</i> “In our time the common good is chiefly guaranteed when personal rights and duties are maintained”. The rights and duties of the person contain a concise summary of the principal moral and juridical requirements that must preside over the construction of the political community. (388)</p> <p>* <i>The political community pursues the common good when it seeks to create a human environment that offers citizens the possibility of truly exercising their human rights and of fulfilling completely their corresponding duties.</i></p> <p><i>The full attainment of the common good requires that the political community develop a twofold and complementary action that defends and promotes human rights.</i> (389)</p>
<p>c. Social life based on civil friendship</p>	<p>* <i>The profound meaning of civil and political life does not arise immediately from the list of personal rights and duties. Life in</i></p>

	<p><i>society takes on all its significance when it is based on civil friendship and on fraternity. Civil friendship understood in this way is the most genuine actualization of the principle of fraternity, which is inseparable from that of freedom and equality. In large part, this principle has not been put into practice in the concrete circumstances of modern political society, above all because of the influence of individualistic and collectivistic ideologies. (390)</i></p> <p><i>* A community has solid foundations when it tends toward the integral promotion of the person and of the common good. In such cases, law is defined, respected and lived according to the manner of solidarity and dedication towards one's neighbour. Justice requires that everyone should be able to enjoy their own goods and rights; this can be considered the minimum measure of love. Social life becomes more human the more it is characterized by efforts to bring about a more mature awareness of the ideal towards which it should be oriented, which is the "civilization of love".</i></p> <p><i>The human being is a person, not just an individual. The term "person" indicates "a nature endowed with intelligence and free will": he is therefore a reality that is far superior to that of a subject defined by the needs arising solely from his material dimension. community vocation. (391)</i></p> <p><i>* The gospel precept of charity enlightens Christians as to the deepest meaning of political life. The goal which believers must put before themselves is that of <i>establishing community relationships among people. The Christian vision of political society places paramount importance on the value of community, both as a model for organizing life in society and as a style of everyday living. (392)</i></i></p>
<p>III. POLITICAL AUTHORITY</p> <p>a) Il fondamento dell'autorità politica</p>	<p><i>* Church has always considered different ways of understanding authority, taking care to defend and propose a model of authority that is founded on the social nature of the person. Political authority is therefore necessary because of the responsibilities assigned to it. Political authority is and must be a positive and irreplaceable component of civil life. (393)</i></p> <p><i>* Political authority must guarantee an ordered and upright community life without usurping the free activity of individuals and groups but disciplining and orienting this freedom, by respecting and defending the independence of the individual and social subjects, for the attainment of the common good. Political authority is an instrument of coordination and direction by means of which the many individuals and intermediate bodies must move towards an order in which relationships, institutions and procedures are put at the service of integral human growth. (394)</i></p> <p><i>* The subject of political authority is the people considered in its</i></p>

<p>b. Authority as moral force</p>	<p><i>entirety as those who have sovereignty.</i> In various forms, this people transfers the exercise of sovereignty to those whom it freely elects as its representatives, but it preserves the prerogative to assert this sovereignty in evaluating the work of those charged with governing and also in replacing them when they do not fulfil their functions satisfactorily. Although this right is operative in every State and in every kind of political regime, a democratic form of government, due to its procedures for verification, allows and guarantees its fullest application. The mere consent of the people is not, however, sufficient for considering “just” the ways in which political authority is exercised. (395)</p> <p>* <i>Authority must be guided by the moral law. All of its dignity derives from its being exercised within the context of the moral order, “which in turn has God for its first source and final end”. Authority cannot be understood as a power determined by criteria of a solely sociological or historical character.</i> (396)</p> <p>* <i>Authority must recognize, respect and promote essential human and moral values.</i> These are innate and “flow from the very truth of the human being and express and safeguard the dignity of the person; values which no individual, no majority and no State can ever create, modify or destroy”. If, as a result of the tragic clouding of the collective conscience, scepticism were to succeed in casting doubt on the basic principles of the moral law, the legal structure of the State itself would be shaken to its very foundations, being reduced to nothing more than a mechanism for the pragmatic regulation of different and opposing interests. (397)</p> <p>* <i>Authority must enact just laws, that is, laws that correspond to the dignity of the human person and to what is required by right reason. “Human law is law insofar as it corresponds to right reason and therefore is derived from the eternal law. When, however, a law is contrary to reason, it is called an unjust law; in such a case it ceases to be law and becomes instead an act of violence”. Whoever refuses to obey an authority that is acting in accordance with the moral order “resists what God has appointed” (Rom 13:2). Analogously, whenever public authority — which has its foundation in human nature and belongs to the order pre-ordained by God — fails to seek the common good, it abandons its proper purpose and so delegitimizes itself.</i> (398)</p>
<p>c. The right to conscientious objection</p>	<p>* <i>Citizens are not obligated in conscience to follow the prescriptions of civil authorities if their precepts are contrary to the demands of the moral order, to the fundamental rights of persons or to the teachings of the Gospel. Unjust laws pose dramatic problems of conscience for morally upright people: when they are called to cooperate in morally evil acts they must refuse.</i></p> <p><i>It is a grave duty of conscience not to cooperate, not even formally, in practices which, although permitted by civil legislation, are contrary</i></p>

<p>c. The right to resist</p>	<p><i>to the Law of God. Such cooperation in fact can never be justified, not by invoking respect for the freedom of others nor by appealing to the fact that it is foreseen and required by civil law. No one can escape the moral responsibility for actions taken, and all will be judged by God himself based on this responsibility (cf. Rom 2:6; 14:12). (399)</i></p> <p><i>* Recognizing that natural law is the basis for and places limits on positive law means admitting that it is legitimate to resist authority should it violate in a serious or repeated manner the essential principles of natural law. Saint Thomas Aquinas writes that “one is obliged to obey ... insofar as it is required by the order of justice”. Natural law is therefore the basis of the right to resistance.</i></p> <p>There can be many different concrete ways this right may be exercised; there are also many different <i>ends</i> that may be pursued. (400)</p> <p><i>* The Church's social doctrine indicates the criteria for exercising the right to resistance: “Armed resistance to oppression by political authority is not legitimate, unless all the following conditions are met: 1) there is certain, grave and prolonged violation of fundamental rights, 2) all other means of redress have been exhausted, 3) such resistance will not provoke worse disorders, 4) there is well-founded hope of success; and 5) it is impossible reasonably to foresee any better solution”. Recourse to arms is seen as an extreme remedy for putting an end to a “manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country”. The gravity of the danger that recourse to violence entails today makes it preferable in any case that <i>passive resistance</i> be practised, which is “a way more conformable to moral principles and having no less prospects for success”. (401)</i></p>
<p>e. Inflicting punishment</p>	<p><i>* In order to protect the common good, the lawful public authority must exercise the right and the duty to inflict punishments according to the seriousness of the crimes committed. The State has the twofold responsibility to discourage behaviour that is harmful to human rights and the fundamental norms of civil life, and to repair, through the penal system, the disorder created by criminal activity. In a State ruled by law the power to inflict punishment is correctly entrusted to the Courts. (402)</i></p> <p><i>* Punishment does not serve merely the purpose of defending the public order and guaranteeing the safety of persons; it becomes as well an instrument for the correction of the offender, a correction that also takes on the moral value of expiation when the guilty party voluntarily accepts his punishment. There is a twofold purpose here. On the one hand, encouraging the re-insertion of the condemned person into society; on the other, fostering a justice that reconciles, a justice capable of restoring harmony in social</i></p>

	<p>relationships disrupted by the criminal act committed.</p> <p><i>In this regard, the activity that prison chaplains are called to undertake is important, not only in the specifically religious dimension of this activity but also in defence of the dignity of those detained.</i> Unfortunately, the conditions under which prisoners serve their time do not always foster respect for their dignity; and often, prisons become places where new crimes are committed. (403)</p> <p><i>* The activity of offices charged with establishing criminal responsibility, which is always personal in character, must strive to be a meticulous search for truth and must be conducted in full respect for the dignity and rights of the human person; this means guaranteeing the rights of the guilty as well as those of the innocent. The juridical principle by which punishment cannot be inflicted if a crime has not first been proven must be borne in mind.</i></p> <p>In carrying out investigations, the regulation against the use of torture, even in the case of serious crimes, must be strictly observed: “Christ's disciple refuses every recourse to such methods, which nothing could justify and in which the dignity of man is as much debased in his torturer as in the torturer's victim”. International juridical instruments concerning human rights correctly indicate a prohibition against torture as a principle which cannot be contravened under any circumstances.</p> <p>Likewise ruled out is “the use of detention for the sole purpose of trying to obtain significant information for the trial”. Moreover, it must be ensured that “trials are conducted swiftly: their excessive length is becoming intolerable for citizens and results in a real injustice”.</p> <p><i>Officials of the court are especially called to exercise due discretion in their investigations so as not to violate the rights of the accused to confidentiality and in order not to undermine the principle of the presumption of innocence. Since even judges can make mistakes, it is proper that the law provide for suitable compensation for victims of judicial errors.</i> (404)</p> <p><i>* The Church sees as a sign of hope “a growing public opposition to the death penalty, even when such a penalty is seen as a kind of ‘legitimate defence’ on the part of society. Modern society in fact has the means of effectively suppressing crime by rendering criminals harmless without definitively denying them the chance to reform”.</i> (405)</p>
<p>IV. THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM</p>	<p><i>* The Encyclical <u>Centesimus Annus</u> contains an explicit and articulate judgment with regard to democracy: “The Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees</i></p>

<p>a. Values and democracy</p>	<p>to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate. Thus she cannot encourage the formation of narrow ruling groups which usurp the power of the State for individual interests or for ideological ends. Authentic democracy is possible only in a State ruled by law, and on the basis of a correct conception of the human person. It requires that the necessary conditions be present for the advancement both of the individual through education and formation in true ideals, and of the ‘subjectivity’ of society through the creation of structures of participation and shared responsibility”. (406)</p> <p>* An authentic democracy is not merely the result of a formal observation of a set of rules but is the fruit of a convinced acceptance of the values that inspire democratic procedures: the dignity of every human person, the respect of human rights, commitment to the common good as the purpose and guiding criterion for political life. If there is no general consensus on these values, the deepest meaning of democracy is lost and its stability is compromised.</p> <p><i>The Church's social doctrine sees ethical relativism, which maintains that there are no objective or universal criteria for establishing the foundations of a correct hierarchy of values.</i> (407)</p>
<p>b. Institutions and democracy</p>	<p>* <i>The Magisterium recognizes the validity of the principle concerning the division of powers in a State:</i> “it is preferable that each power be balanced by other powers and by other spheres of responsibility which keep it within proper bounds. This is the principle of the ‘rule of law’, in which the law is sovereign, and not the arbitrary will of individuals”.</p> <p><i>In the democratic system, political authority is accountable to the people. The obligation on the part of those elected to give an accounting of their work — which is guaranteed by respecting electoral terms — is a constitutive element of democratic representation.</i> (408)</p> <p><i>In their specific areas (drafting laws, governing, setting up systems of checks and balances), elected officials must strive to seek and attain that which will contribute to making civil life proceed well in its overall course.</i> (409)</p>
<p>c. Moral components of political representation</p>	<p>* <i>Those with political responsibilities must not forget or underestimate the moral dimension of political representation, which consists in the commitment to share fully in the destiny of the people and to seek solutions to social problems.</i> In this perspective, responsible authority also means authority exercised with those virtues that make it possible to <i>put power into practice as service</i> (patience, modesty, moderation, charity, efforts to share), an</p>

	<p>problems is unthinkable. It is necessary to guarantee a real pluralism in this delicate area of social life, ensuring that there are many forms and instruments of information and communications. It is likewise necessary to facilitate conditions of equality in the possession and use of these instruments by means of appropriate laws. Among the obstacles that hinder the full exercise of the right to objectivity in information, special attention must be given to the phenomenon of the news media being controlled by just a few people or groups. This has dangerous effects for the entire democratic system when this phenomenon is accompanied by ever closer ties between governmental activity and the financial and information establishments. (414)</p> <p>* The media must be used to build up and sustain the human community in its different sectors: economic, political, cultural, educational and religious. “The information provided by the media is at the service of the common good. Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, justice and solidarity”. (415)</p> <p>* <i>In the world of the media the intrinsic difficulties of communications are often exacerbated by ideology, the desire for profit and political control, rivalry and conflicts between groups, and other social evils.</i> Moral values and principles apply also to the media. The ethical dimension relates not just to the content of communication (the message) and the process of communication.</p> <p><i>In all three areas — the message, the process and structural issues — one fundamental moral principle always applies: the human person and the human community are the end and measure of the use of the media. A second principle is complementary to the first: the good of human beings cannot be attained independently of the common good of the community to which they belong.</i> (416)</p>
<p>V. THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY AT THE SERVICE OF CIVIL SOCIETY</p> <p>a. Value of civil society</p> <p>b. Priority of civil society</p>	<p>* <i>The political community is established to be of service to civil society, from which it originates.</i></p> <p><i>Civil society is the sum of relationships and resources, cultural and associative, that are relatively independent from the political sphere and the economic sector.</i> (417)</p> <p><i>The political community and civil society, although mutually connected and interdependent, are not equal in the hierarchy of ends. The political community is essentially at the service of civil society and, in the final analysis, the persons and groups of which civil society is composed. Civil society, therefore, cannot be considered an extension or a changing component of the political community; rather, it has priority because it is in civil society itself that the political community finds its justification.</i></p> <p><i>The State must provide an adequate legal framework for social</i></p>

<p>c. Application of the principle of subsidiarity</p>	<p><i>subjects to engage freely in their different activities and it must be ready to intervene, when necessary and with respect for the principle of subsidiarity</i>, so that the interplay between free associations and democratic life may be directed to the common good. Civil society is in fact multifaceted and irregular; it does not lack its ambiguities and contradictions. It is also the arena where different interests clash with one another, with the risk that the stronger will prevail over the weaker. (418)</p> <p>* The political community is responsible for regulating its relations with civil society according to the principle of subsidiarity. It is essential that the growth of democratic life begin within the fabric of society. The activities of civil society — above all volunteer organizations and cooperative endeavours in the private-social sector, all of which are succinctly known as the “third sector”, to distinguish from the State and the market — represent the most appropriate ways to develop the social dimension of the person, who finds in these activities the necessary space to express himself fully. (419)</p> <p>* <i>Cooperation, even in its less structured forms, shows itself to be one of the most effective responses to a mentality of conflict and unlimited competition that seems so prevalent today.</i> The relationships that are established in a climate of cooperation and solidarity overcome ideological divisions, prompting people to seek out what unites them rather than what divides them.</p> <p><i>Many experiences of volunteer work are examples of great value that call people to look upon civil society as a place where it is possible to rebuild a public ethic based on solidarity, concrete cooperation and fraternal dialogue.</i> (420)</p>
<p>VI. THE STATE AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES</p> <p>A. RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT</p>	<p>* <i>The Second Vatican Council committed the Catholic Church to the promotion of religious freedom.</i> The Declaration <i>Dignitatis Humanae</i> explains in its subtitle that it intends to proclaim “the right of the person and of communities to social and civil freedom in religious matters”. In order that this freedom, willed by God and inscribed in human nature, may be exercised, no obstacle should be placed in its way, since “the truth cannot be imposed except by virtue of its own truth”. The dignity of the person and the very nature of the quest for God require that all men and women should be free from every constraint in the area of religion. Society and the State must not force a person to act against his conscience or prevent him from acting in conformity with it. Religious freedom is not a moral licence to adhere to error, nor as an implicit right to error. (421)</p> <p>* <i>Freedom of conscience and religion “concerns man both individually and socially”.</i>[. (422)</p>

<p>B. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY</p> <p>a. Autonomy and independence</p> <p>b) Collaboration</p>	<p>* <i>Because of its historical and cultural ties to a nation, a religious community might be given special recognition on the part of the State. Such recognition must in no way create discrimination within the civil or social order for other religious groups. The Church is well aware that this vision is not shared by all; the right to religious freedom, unfortunately, “is being violated by many States, even to the point that imparting catechesis, having it imparted, and receiving it become punishable offences”. (423)</i></p> <p>* <i>Although the Church and the political community both manifest themselves in visible organizational structures, they are by nature different because of their configuration and because of the ends they pursue. The Second Vatican Council solemnly reaffirmed that, “in their proper spheres, the political community and the Church are mutually independent and self-governing”.</i></p> <p>The duty to respect religious freedom requires that the political community guarantee the Church the space needed to carry out her mission. For her part, the Church has no particular area of competence concerning the structures of the political community: “The Church respects the <i>legitimate autonomy of the democratic order</i> and is not entitled to express preferences for this or that institutional or constitutional solution”, nor does it belong to her to enter into questions of the merit of political programmes, except as concerns their religious or moral implications. (424)</p> <p>* <i>The mutual autonomy of the Church and the political community does not entail a separation that excludes cooperation. Both of them, although by different titles, serve the personal and social vocation of the same human beings.</i> (425)</p> <p>* <i>The Church has the right to the legal recognition of her proper identity.</i></p> <p>The Church therefore seeks: freedom of expression, teaching and evangelization; freedom of public worship; freedom of organization and of her own internal government; freedom of selecting, educating, naming and transferring her ministers; freedom for constructing religious buildings; freedom to acquire and possess sufficient goods for her activity; and freedom to form associations not only for religious purposes but also for educational, cultural, health care and charitable purposes. (426)</p> <p>* <i>In order to prevent or attenuate possible conflicts between the Church and the political community, the juridical experience of the Church and the State have variously defined stable forms of contact and suitable instruments for guaranteeing harmonious relations.</i> (427)</p>
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Charismatic Reflection

The Church searches the Sacred Scriptures for responses to contemporary questions. New discoveries are made that offer renewed biblical images of God and of Jesus that help us deepen the fundamental biblical notion of justice, peace and integrity of creation. One such image is that of a relational God. In this light, the biblical themes of JPIC are based on a practice of **right relationships**.

God repeatedly takes the initiative to reveal Himself as **Love and Compassion** because of his desire to establish profound relationships between Himself and his creatures, among peoples, and between people and the rest of creation. It is precisely the disruption of any of these relationships that constitutes sin, experienced as injustice, violence and offence against life.

God's desire to be in relationship with humanity is manifested, first of all, in the creation of man and woman in God's image – God sharing divinity and dignity with us. **God relates to us with unfailing love and boundless compassion**. God has a plan for humankind, and for each person. **God's plan reflects God's desire for our good**, offering to us an abundance of life and a future filled with hope, healing guidance and nourishment.

Both as individuals and as communities, we need authentic freedom to be able to experience this abundant life and to live fully our identity and relationship as beings created in the likeness and image of God. This freedom, as part of God's plan for humanity, is one of the main themes of Scripture. **The liberating action of Yahweh which serves as model and reference for all others is the Exodus from Egypt**. Egypt, the context of deliverance, can be seen as an archetype of bondage, the Israelites suffer systematic economic exploitation, social discrimination, and political, cultural and religious oppression Their hardship is such that they become disconnected with their very identity as God's people.

Yet, God hears their cry, not because of their piety or devotion but because of their suffering and helplessness. In response to this cry, **God sets his people free** and gives them descendants, and land and a law ... within a Covenant and for a Covenant.

It is important to realize that the **social, political and religious dimensions of the Exodus are inseparable**. Israel is freed from an unquestioned status quo, painful yet familiar, for the risk and promise of freedom and the discovery of their deepest identity as God's people.

The result of the community being in such a Covenant communion with God is peace. In Hebrew, the word "peace" or "shalom" conveys a sense of "wholeness" and wellbeing. This peace, as God's gift and desire for us, is intricately linked with truth and God's own justice: **Justice will bring about peace: right will produce calm and security. My people will live in a peaceful country, in secure dwellings and quiet resting places. (Is 12:17-18)**

Jesus further reveals the nature of God's way of relating with humanity. His parables in the Gospel point to a new understanding of that relationship, based on a world order of justice as conceived by Jesus. He tells stories to illustrate, in often shocking ways, **the Divine justice of mercy, compassion, understanding and forgiveness**:

- The merciful Master, cancelling the unpayable debt of his servant;
- The Compassionate Employer, seemingly irrational in his generosity with labourers;
- The Forgiving Father, lavishing tenderness on his wayward son
- This all reveals a God whose love stands outside the constraints of human expectations.

Magdalene was a woman of contemplation and action. Enlightened by the Word of God and through a long and painful process of searching both within herself and in the events that surrounded her, she was able to define and realize the ministries of charity as her response to the emergent poverty of her time. Magdalene looked at **Jesus Crucified** as “**the centre of her life**” and to the values for which he lived and died as inspiration, model and source of motivation. She handed on this gift of the Spirit as her legacy to her companions and impressed upon every member of her Religious Family the necessity to constantly gaze at this Jesus as Servant of humanity, who makes the supreme self-offering.

Jesus as Servant of humanity, who makes the supreme self-offering, is our Model for human relationships and for a lifestyle of true dedication to God and our neighbours. **His Spirit is one of charity, gentleness, meekness, humility, zeal and fortitude, a most amiable, most generous, most patient. It is this Spirit that challenged the injustices, divisions and violence of this time and catalysed its transformation by his surrender to the Cross. Motivated by love,** He broke the cycle of sin and established the certainty of New Life. When this same spirit permeates our relationships and ministries of charity, it can call forth and enhance the feminine qualities that promote and nourish life.

Jesus also identified with and chose to be poor. Hence Magdalene saw the poor as his images and chose to serve and become one of them. For her, to know how to love and how to be poor, one must look at Jesus who was stripped of everything on the Cross, except of his love. **Such contemplation puts everything in place.**

Likewise, the Foundress exhorts us to gaze on Mary as stands at the foot of Jesus’ Cross gathering us sinners to her heart. It was at this agonizing moment that she shines with the same love through a gesture of reconciliation **and universal motherhood. By standing under the Cross of Her dying Son, she inspires us to be in solidarity with the innocent, oppressed, and degraded even till the bleakest moments of their lives at the cost of great personal suffering. This pain was like the pangs of birth that also affirmed her belief in a new life to come.**

*By the grace of God
let us serve Him with all our heart
and work for His Glory.*

*God wants us to stay at the foot of the Cross
With His most holy Mother.*

Maddalena di Canossa

CELEBRATION

- **In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**
- **Amen**

INTRODUCTION

At first sight, it would seem that the author of the Book of Wisdom addresses himself to those who govern, and yet its message is valid for each one of us.

To Govern means “to give orders with authority, to be at the helm of the state.” God, when He created us, placed the whole universe under His dominion. With the Ten Commandments He gave us rules in order to regulate our relationship with Him and our neighbour. **By means of prophets He helped us to understand the laws and the Covenant.**

By means of **the Book of Wisdom** explains how to exercise government through the love of justice and searching for wisdom, that is dedicating our life to fulfil and promoting His Will.

Some people only speak of corruption in politics and for this reason they refuse to take part in it. The Bible denounces corrupted government officials but praises the mission of politicians as those who guide the people so as to reach common good.

Politics is a noble activity and its best expression is human solidarity, therefore every person should take part in it with responsibility.

For us Christians solidarity is an integral of our commitment to God.

We must ensure that every person may live with dignity and we have a moral obligation to help our government and its political parties to use power with justice and to carry out their mission with wisdom.

PRAISE OF WISDOM RESPONSIBILITY OF STATESMEN (WISDOM 6: 1-11)

Listen then, kings, and understand:
rulers of remotest lands, take warning;
hear this, you who have thousands under your rule,
who boast of your hordes of subjects.
For power is a gift from the Lord,
sovereignty is from the Most High;
he himself will probe your acts and scrutinize your intentions.

If, as administrators of his kingdom, you have not governed justly
He will fall on you swiftly and terribly.
Ruthless judgment is reserved for the high and mighty;
the lowly will be compassionately pardoned,
the mighty will be mightily punished.
For the Lord of All does not cower before a personage,
He does not stand in awe of greatness,
since he himself has made small and great
and provides for all alike;
but strict scrutiny awaits those in power.
Yes, despots, my words are for you,

that you may learn what wisdom is and not transgress;
for they who observe holy things holily will be adjudged holy,
and, accepting instruction from them, will find their defence in them.
Look forward, therefore, to my words;
Yearn for them and they will instruct you.

GIUSEPPE LAZZATI – A LAY PERSON OF OUR TIMES

Giuseppe Lazzati is a luminous figure of a lay Christian: his itineraries in the ambit of Catholic Action and the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan (of which he was Rector until 1983), left permanent signs in the Italian Ecclesial community.

These are the words of a Lay Christian and a witness of our times on the theme of politics:

“Today, love for one’s brothers and sisters has a particular manifestation in the commitment to use worldly things according to God’s design, that is to organise society so that every person may know and love each other as brothers and sisters.

For a Christian who has understood completely what it means to be such, commitment which I consider to be politics, is the truest expression of charity. It is certainly a sign of love to give bread to those who are hungry, if by chance I will meet them, but it is a more demanding commitment to organise earthly realities so that a person may not lack either food, a house, clothes a job

This is political commitment.

It is a commitment that can be identified as service of our brothers and sisters, so that they may receive what the Father’s love has prepared for them, distributing His gifts to everyone in the world, being at the service of each and every person..

(...) If politics were to be carried out by Christian, in the true sense of the word, politics would be something pure and transparent, a service of charity rendered to humanity.”

(Giuseppe Lazzati, *La carità* – Quaderni di S. Salvatore, AVE 1988, pp.25-27)

OUR FATHER

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Lord, help me to govern in holiness and justice.
Grant me wisdom so as to understand justice and laws.
Teach me what is pleasing to you.
Send me your glory so as to protect me.
Send me your Holy Spirit to know your will\.

(Solomon asks for wisdom: Sap. 9, 1-18)

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 evaluation of our lifestyle** includes a personal and community examination of our relationship with the political community.
What can you do so that **honest politicians** may become better and **corrupted politicians** may be converted or leave their place? Perhaps the Lord has given you the desire and capacity of assuming political responsibilities for the common good?
4. It is necessary to start from ourselves, our daily life, from universities and workplaces, from our families and parishes, in order to think of modifying also the institutions. Paul VI indicated **political commitment as "the most demanding form of charity."** Why instead do we consider politics as something far away and distant from us? Why, sometimes, do we despise one of the most important modalities of helping others?
5. Today, a time in which all social bonds and ties seem broken, the Lay Canossian is called to live for others and with others. Do I commit myself in order to witness, with coherence, that I am concern about people and their dignity? **Am I aware that politics deserves attention and trust**, but it even requires participation, orientation towards the common good and a search for the truth? **Am I willing to give "something more" of my talents?** Do I know that it is my duty not to abandon politics and start again an intense and passionate dialogue with politics?
6. **Try to enter your innerself**, 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.
7. **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.


