

From *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*

Person, Nature, & Human Flourishing

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NOTE: To access endnotes, indicated in square brackets, please see on-line full text at

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

37. *The Book of Genesis provides us with certain foundations of Christian anthropology: the inalienable dignity of the human person, the roots and guarantee of which are found in God's design of creation; the constitutive social nature of human beings, the prototype of which is found in the original relationship between man and woman, the union of whom “constitutes the first form of communion between persons” [38]; the meaning of human activity in the world, which is linked to the discovery and respect of the laws of nature that God has inscribed in the created universe, so that humanity may live in it and care for it in accordance with God's will. This vision of the human person, of society and of history is rooted in God and is ever more clearly seen when his plan of salvation becomes a reality.*

47. *The human person, in himself and in his vocation, transcends the limits of the created universe, of society and of history: his ultimate end is God himself [50], who has revealed himself to men in order to invite them and receive them into communion with himself [51]. “Man cannot give himself to a purely human plan for reality, to an abstract ideal or to a false utopia. As a person, he can give himself to another person or to other persons, and ultimately to God, who is the author of his being and who alone can fully accept his gift” [52]. For this reason, “a man is alienated if he refuses to transcend himself and to live the experience of self-giving and of the formation of an authentic human community oriented towards his final destiny, which is God. A society is alienated if its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer this gift of self and to establish this solidarity between people” [53].*

127. *Man was created by God in unity of body and soul [238]. “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. These definitions not only point out that the body, which has been promised the resurrection, will also*

share in glory. They also remind us that reason and free will are linked with all the bodily and sense faculties. *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*"[239].

128. *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"*[240]. 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"[241]. Because of this bodily dimension, however, following the wound of sin, man experiences the rebellion of his body and the perverse inclinations of his heart; he must always keep careful watch over these lest he become enslaved to them and become a victim of a purely earthly vision of life.

Through his spirituality man moves beyond the realm of mere things and plunges into the innermost structure of reality. 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. In his inner life he recognizes that the person has "a spiritual and immortal soul" and he knows that the person is not merely "a speck of nature or a nameless constituent of the city of man"[242].

129. *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* and to the discovery of "more penetrating truths", thanks to his intellect, by which "he shares in the light of the divine mind"[243]. The Church affirms: "The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the 'form' of the body: i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature"[244]. Neither the spiritualism that despises the reality of the body nor the materialism that considers the spirit a mere manifestation of the material do justice to the complex nature, to the totality or to the unity of the human being.

130. *Openness to transcendence belongs to the human person: man is open to the infinite and to all created beings.* He is open above all to the infinite — God

— because with his intellect and will he raises himself above all the created order and above himself, he becomes independent from creatures, is free in relation to created things and tends towards total truth and the absolute good. He is open also to others, to the men and women of the world, because only insofar as he understands himself in reference to a “thou” can he say “I”. He comes out of himself, from the self-centred preservation of his own life, to enter into a relationship of dialogue and communion with others.

The human person is open to the fullness of being, to the unlimited horizon of being. He has in himself the ability to transcend the individual particular objects that he knows, thanks effectively to his openness to unlimited being. In a certain sense the human soul is — because of its cognitive dimension — all things: “all immaterial things enjoy a certain infiniteness, insofar as they embrace everything, or because it is a question of the essence of a spiritual reality that functions as a model and likeness of everything, as is the case with God, or because it has a likeness to everything or is ‘in act’ like the Angels or ‘in potential’ like souls”[245].

131. *Man exists as a unique and unrepeatable being, he exists as an “I” capable of self-understanding, self-possession and self-determination.* The human person is an intelligent and conscious being, capable of reflecting on himself and therefore of being aware of himself and his actions. However, it is not intellect, consciousness and freedom that define the person, rather it is the person who is the basis of the acts of intellect, consciousness and freedom. These acts can even be absent, for even without them man does not cease to be a person.

The human person, must always be understood in his unrepeatable and inviolable uniqueness. In fact, man exists above all as a *subjective entity*, as a centre of *consciousness* and *freedom*, whose unique life experiences, comparable to those of no one else, underlie the inadmissibility of any attempt to reduce his status by forcing him into preconceived categories or power systems, whether ideological or otherwise. This entails above all the requirement not only of simple *respect* on the part of others, especially political and social institutions and their leaders with regard to every man and woman on the earth, but even more, this means that the primary commitment of each person towards others, and particularly of these same institutions, must be for the promotion and integral development of the person.