

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

105. *The Church sees in men and women, in every person, the living image of God himself. 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.* It is to these men and women, who have received an incomparable and inalienable dignity from God himself, that the Church speaks, rendering to them the highest and most singular service, constantly reminding them of their lofty vocation so that they may always be mindful of it and worthy of it. Christ, the Son of God, “by his incarnation has united himself in some fashion with every person”[197]; for this reason the Church recognizes as her fundamental duty the task of seeing that this union is continuously brought about and renewed. 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” (1 Cor 8:11; Rom 14:15)[199].

106. *All of social life is an expression of its unmistakable protagonist: the human person.* The Church has many times and in many ways been the authoritative advocate of this understanding, recognizing and affirming the centrality of the human person in every sector and expression of society: “Human society is therefore the object of the social teaching of the Church since she is neither outside nor over and above socially united men, but exists exclusively in them and, therefore, for them”[200]. This important awareness is expressed in the affirmation that “far from being the object or passive element of social life” the human person “is rather, and must always remain, its subject, foundation and goal”[201]. 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.

- 110.** *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”[208]. In this regard the fact that God created *human beings as man and woman* (cf. *Gen 1:27*) is significant[209]: “How very significant is the dissatisfaction which marks man's life in Eden as long as his sole point of reference is the world of plants and animals (cf. *Gen 2:20*). Only the appearance of the woman, a being who is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones (cf. *Gen 2:23*), and in whom the spirit of God the Creator is also alive, can satisfy the need for interpersonal dialogue, so vital for human existence. In one's neighbour, whether man or woman, there is a reflection of God himself, the definitive goal and fulfilment of every person”[210].
- 111.** *Man and woman have the same dignity and are of equal value*[211], *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*[212]. 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[213]. Their covenant of union is presented in Sacred Scripture as an image of the Covenant of God with man (cf. *Hos 1-3; Is 54; Eph 5:21-33*) and, at the same time, as a service to life[214]. Indeed, the human couple can participate in God's act of creation: “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it’ “ (*Gen 1:28*).
- 125.** The human person may never be thought of only as an absolute individual being, 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. Reductionist conceptions of the full truth of men and women have already been the object of the Church's social concern many times, and she has not failed to raise her voice against these, as against other drastically reductive perspectives, taking care to proclaim instead that “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”[234]. She has affirmed instead that man cannot be understood “simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism”[235], and is therefore attentive that the affirmation of the primacy of the person is not seen as corresponding to an individualistic or mass vision.

146. *“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: “The condition that will assure the rightful presence of woman in the Church and in society is a more penetrating and accurate consideration of the anthropological foundation for masculinity and femininity with the intent of clarifying woman's personal identity in relation to man, that is, a diversity yet mutual complementarily, not only as it concerns roles to be held and functions to be performed, but also, and more deeply, as it concerns her make-up and meaning as a person”[287].*
147. 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. It is the “unity of the two”[288], or in other words a relational “uni-duality”, that allows each person to experience the interpersonal and reciprocal relationship as a gift that at the same time is a mission: “to this ‘unity of the two’ God has entrusted not only the work of procreation and family life, but the creation of history itself”[289]. “The woman is ‘a helper’ for the man, just as the man is ‘a helper’ for the woman!”[290]: in the encounter of man and woman a unitary conception of the human person is brought about, based not on the logic of self-centredness and self-affirmation, but on that of love and solidarity.
148. *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”[291]. 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 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”[292]. Great attention must be paid not only to the physical and psychological work conditions, to a just wage, to the possibility of promotion and the elimination of obstacles, but also to the affective and sexual dimensions of persons with disabilities: “They too need to love and to be loved, they need tenderness, closeness and intimacy”[293], according to their capacities and with respect for the moral order, which is the same for the non-handicapped and the handicapped alike.

- 149.** *The human person is essentially a social being* [294] *because God, who created humanity, willed it so*[295]. 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*, that is, in the manner of a free and responsible being who recognizes the necessity of integrating himself in cooperation with his fellow human beings, and who is *capable of communion* with them on the level of knowledge and love. “A *society* is a group of persons bound together organically by a principle of unity that goes beyond each one of them. As an assembly that is at once visible and spiritual, a society endures through time: it gathers up the past and prepares for the future”[296].

It is therefore necessary to stress that community life is a natural characteristic that distinguishes man from the rest of earthly creatures. Social activity carries in itself a particular sign of man and of humanity that of a person at work within a community of persons: this is the sign that determines man's interior traits and in a sense constitutes his very nature[297]. This relational characteristic takes on, in the light of faith, a more profound and enduring meaning. Made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26), and made visible in the universe in order to live in society (cf. Gen 2:20,23) and exercise dominion over the earth (cf. Gen 1:26,28- 30), the human person is for this reason called from the very beginning to life in society: “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: he can only grow and realize his vocation in relation with others"[298].

- 150.** *The social nature of human beings does not automatically lead to communion among persons, to the gift of self.* 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[299]. 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. 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. The different human societies also must establish among themselves relationships of solidarity, communication and cooperation, in the service of man and the common good[300].
- 151.** *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*. 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. “To promote the participation of the greatest number in the life of a society, the creation of voluntary associations and institutions must be encouraged ‘on both national and international levels, which relate to economic and social goals, to cultural and recreational activities, to sport, to various professions, and to political affairs’. This ‘*socialization*’ also expresses the natural tendency for the sake of attaining objectives that exceed individual capacities. It develops the qualities of the person, especially the sense of initiative and responsibility, and helps guarantee his rights”[301].