

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

26. *The reflection of the Prophets and that found in the Wisdom Literature, in coming to the formulation of the principle that all things were created by God, touch on the first manifestation and the source itself of God's plan for the whole of humanity.* In Israel's profession of faith, to affirm that God is Creator does not mean merely expressing a theoretical conviction, but also grasping the original extent of the Lord's gratuitous and merciful action on behalf of man. In fact, God freely confers being and life on everything that exists. Man and woman, created in his image and likeness (cf. *Gen 1:26-27*), are for that very reason called to be the visible sign and the effective instrument of divine gratuitousness in the garden where God has placed them as cultivators and custodians of the goods of creation.
33. *The commandment of mutual love, which represents the law of life for God's people*[32], *must inspire, purify and elevate all human relationships in society and in politics.* “To be human means to be called to interpersonal communion”[33], because the image and the likeness of the Trinitarian God are the basis of the whole of “*human 'ethos'*, which reaches its apex in the commandment of love”[34]. The modern cultural, social, economic and political phenomenon of interdependence, which intensifies and makes particularly evident the bonds that unite the human family, accentuates once more, in the light of Revelation, “a new *model of the unity of the human race, which must ultimately inspire our solidarity.* This supreme *model of unity, which is a reflection of the intimate life of God, one God in three Persons, is what we Christians mean by the word 'communion'*”[35].
34. *The revelation in Christ of the mystery of God as Trinitarian love is at the same time the revelation of the vocation of the human person to love. This revelation sheds light on every aspect of the personal dignity and freedom of men and women, and on the depths of their*

*social nature.* “Being a person in the image and likeness of God ... involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other ‘I’” [36], because God himself, one and triune, is the communion of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

*In the communion of love that is God, and in which the Three Divine Persons mutually love one another and are the One God, the human person is called to discover the origin and goal of his existence and of history.* The Council Fathers, in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, teach that “the Lord Jesus Christ, when praying to the Father ‘that they may all be one ... as we are one’ (Jn 17:21-22), has opened up new horizons closed to human reason by implying that there is a certain parallel between the union existing among the divine Persons and the union of the children of God in truth and love. It follows, then, that if man is the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake, man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself (cf. Lk 17:33)” [37].

- 35.** *Christian revelation shines a new light on the identity, the vocation and the ultimate destiny of the human person and the human race.* Every person is created by God, loved and saved in Jesus Christ, and fulfils himself by creating a network of multiple relationships of love, justice and solidarity with other persons while he goes about his various activities in the world. Human activity, when it aims at promoting the integral dignity and vocation of the person, the quality of living conditions and the meeting in solidarity of peoples and nations, is in accordance with the plan of God, who does not fail to show his love and providence to his children.
- 36.** The pages of the first book of Sacred Scripture, which describe the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27), contain a fundamental teaching with regard to the identity and the vocation of the human person. They tell us that the creation of man and woman is a free and gratuitous act of God; that man and woman, because they are free and intelligent, represent the “thou” created by God and that only in relationship with him can they discover and fulfil the authentic and complete meaning of their personal and social lives; that in their complementarities and reciprocity they are the image of Trinitarian Love in the created universe; that to them, as the culmination of creation, the Creator has entrusted the task of ordering created nature according to his design (cf. Gen 1:28).

- 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.*
- 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.

- 107.** *Men and women, in the concrete circumstances of history, represent the heart and soul of Catholic social thought*[202]. *The whole of the Church's social doctrine, in fact, develops from the principle that affirms the inviolable dignity of the human person*[203]. In her manifold expressions of this knowledge, the Church has striven above all to defend human dignity in the face of every attempt to redimension or distort its image; moreover she has often denounced the many violations of human dignity. History attests that it is from the fabric of social relationships that there arise some of the best possibilities for ennobling the human person, but it is also there that lie in wait the most loathsome rejections of human dignity.
- 108.** *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, "*adam*") is formed from the earth ("*adamah*") 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. 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"[204].
- 109.** *The likeness with God shows that the essence and existence of man are constitutively related to God in the most profound manner.*[205] This is a relationship that exists in itself, it is therefore not something that comes afterwards and is not added from the outside. The whole of man's life is a quest and a search for God. This relationship with God can be ignored or even forgotten or dismissed, but it can never be eliminated. Indeed, among all the world's visible creatures, only man has a "capacity for God" ("*homo est Dei capax*").[206] 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.[207 ]
- 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*).
- 112.** *Man and woman are in relationship with others above all as those to whom the lives of others have been entrusted*[215]. “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*[216]. The fifth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (*Ex 20:13; Deut 5:17*), has validity because God alone is Lord of life and death[217]. 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*).
- 113.** *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. This is a marvellous challenge to his intellect, which should lift him up as on wings [218] towards the contemplation of the truth of all God's creatures, that is, the contemplation of what God sees as *good* in them. The Book of Genesis teaches that human dominion over the world consists in *naming things* (cf. *Gen 2:19-20*). In giving things their names, man must recognize them for what they are and establish with each of them a relationship of responsibility[219].

- 114.** *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. God “has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end” (*Eccles 3:11*). In the end, the heart indicates the spiritual faculties which most properly belong to man, which are his prerogatives insofar as he is created in the image of his Creator: reason, the discernment of good and evil, free will[220]. 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”[221].