

From *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*
Person, Nature, & Human Flourishing
Aquinas College, Nashville, Tennessee
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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

14. *By means of the present document, the Church intends to offer a contribution of truth to the question of man's place in nature and in human society, a question faced by civilizations and cultures in which expressions of human wisdom are found. Rooted in a past that is often thousands of years old and manifesting themselves in forms of religion, philosophy and poetic genius of every time and of every people, these civilizations and cultures offer their own interpretation of the universe and of human society, and seek an understanding of existence and of the mystery that surrounds it. Who am I? Why is there pain, evil, death, despite all the progress that has been made? What is the value of so many accomplishments if the cost has been unbearable? What will there be after this life? These are the basic questions that characterize the course of human life[17]. In this regard, we can recall the admonition "Know yourself", carved on the temple portal at Delphi, which testifies to the basic truth that man, called to be set apart from the rest of creation, is *man* precisely because in his essence he is oriented to *knowing himself*.*
15. *The direction that human existence, society and history will take depends largely on the answers given to the questions of man's place in nature and society; the purpose of the present document is to make a contribution to these answers. The deepest meaning of human existence, in fact, is revealed in the free quest for that truth capable of giving direction and fullness to life. The aforementioned questions incessantly draw human intelligence and the human will to this quest. They are the highest expression of human nature, since they require a response that measures the depth of an individual's commitment to his own existence. Moreover, it is dealt here with *questions that are essentially religious*: "When the 'why of things' is investigated integrally with the search for the ultimate and exhaustive answer, then human reason reaches its apex and opens itself to religiousness. ... religiousness represents the loftiest expression of the human person, because it is the culmination of his rational nature. It springs from man's profound aspiration for truth and is at the basis of the free and personal search he makes for the divine"[18].*
16. *The fundamental questions accompanying the human journey from the very beginning take on even greater significance in our own day, because of the enormity of the challenges, the novelty of the situations and the importance of the decisions facing modern generations.*

The first of the great challenges facing humanity today is that of *the truth itself of the being who is man*. The boundary and relation between nature, technology and

morality are issues that decisively summon personal and collective responsibility with regard to the attitudes to adopt concerning what human beings are, what they are able to accomplish and what they should be. A second challenge is found in *the understanding and management of pluralism and differences* at every level: in ways of thinking, moral choices, culture, religious affiliation, philosophy of human and social development. The third challenge is *globalization*, the significance of which is much wider and more profound than simple economic globalization, since history has witnessed the opening of a new era that concerns humanity's destiny.

17. *The disciples of Jesus Christ feel that they are involved with these questions; they too carry them within their hearts and wish to commit themselves, together with all men and women, to the quest for the truth and the meaning of life lived both as individual persons and as a society. They contribute to this quest by their generous witness to the free and extraordinary gift that humanity has received: God has spoken his Word to men and women throughout history; indeed he himself has entered history in order to enter into dialogue with humanity and to reveal to mankind his plan of salvation, justice and brotherhood. In Jesus Christ, his Son made man, God has freed us from sin and has shown us the path we are to walk and the goal towards which we are to strive.*

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].

40. *The universality and integrality of the salvation wrought by Christ makes indissoluble the link between the relationship that the person is called to have with God and the responsibility he has towards his neighbour in the concrete circumstances of history. This is sensed, though not always without some confusion or misunderstanding, in humanity's universal quest for truth and meaning, and it becomes the cornerstone of God's covenant with Israel, as attested by the tablets of the Law and the preaching of the Prophets.*

This link finds a clear and precise expression in the teaching of Jesus Christ and is definitively confirmed by the supreme witness of the giving of his life, in obedience to the Father's will and out of love for his brothers and sisters. To the scribe who asks him "Which commandment is the first of all?" (Mk 12:28), Jesus answers: "The first is: 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength'. The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mk 12:29-31).

Inextricably linked in the human heart are the relationship with God — recognized as Creator and Father, the source and fulfilment of life and of salvation — and openness in concrete love towards man, who must be treated as another self, even if he is an enemy (cf. Mt 5:43-44). In man's inner dimension are rooted, in the final analysis, the commitment to justice and solidarity, to the building up of a social, economic and political life that corresponds to God's plan.

45. *Jesus Christ is the Son of God made man in whom and thanks to whom the world and man attain their authentic and full truth. The mystery of God's being infinitely close to man — brought about in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, who gave himself on the cross, abandoning himself to death — shows that the more that human realities are seen in the light of God's plan and lived in communion with God, the more they are empowered and liberated in their distinctive identity and in the freedom that is proper to them. Sharing in Christ's life of sonship, made possible by the Incarnation and the Paschal gift of the Spirit, far from being a mortification, has the effect of unleashing the authentic and independent traits and identity that characterize human beings in all their various expressions.*

This perspective leads to a correct approach to earthly realities and their autonomy, which is strongly emphasized by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council: "If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. This ... harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth,

goodness, proper laws and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts”[48].

46. There is no state of conflict between God and man, but a relationship of love in which the world and the fruits of human activity in the world are objects of mutual gift between the Father and his children, and among the children themselves, in Christ Jesus; in Christ and thanks to him the world and man attain their authentic and inherent meaning. In a universal vision of God's love that embraces everything that exists, God himself is revealed to us in Christ as Father and giver of life, and man as the one who, in Christ, receives everything from God as gift, humbly and freely, and who truly possesses everything as his own when he knows and experiences everything as belonging to God, originating in God and moving towards God. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council teaches: “If the expression ‘the autonomy of earthly affairs’ is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is. For without the Creator, the creature would disappear”[49].
75. *Faith and reason represent the two cognitive paths of the Church's social doctrine: Revelation and human nature.* The “knowing” of faith understands and directs the life of men and women according to the light of the historical-salvific mystery, God's revelation and gift of himself to us in Christ. This understanding of faith includes reason, by means of which — insofar as possible — it unravels and comprehends revealed truth and integrates it with the truth of human nature, found in the divine plan expressed in creation[106]. This is the *integral truth* of the human person as a spiritual and corporeal being, in relationship with God, with other human beings and with other creatures[107].

Being centered on the mystery of Christ, moreover, does not weaken or exclude the role of reason and hence does not deprive the Church's social doctrine of rationality or, therefore, of universal applicability. Since the mystery of Christ illuminates the mystery of man, it gives fullness of meaning to human dignity and to the ethical requirements which defend it. The Church's social doctrine is knowledge enlightened by faith, which, as such, is the expression of a greater capacity for knowledge. It explains to all people the truths that it affirms and the duties that it demands; it can be accepted and shared by all.