



**Catholic Civic Responsibility**

**The Responsibility  
of the Catholic Citizen  
in a Free Society**

**Resource Book**



**Knights of Columbus**



## Catholic Civic Responsibility

# Introduction

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Supreme Knight

Among the democracies established by peoples of varied nations for their governance, that of the United States of America is considered exemplary. This is so not only because it was first, but also because of the documents through which the Founding Fathers gave it life: The Declaration of Independence and The Constitution.

Neither document, however, was made from whole cloth. Many of the principles delineated therein are based as much on religious truth as on political expediency. Indeed some scholars give credit for several of the ideas embodied in the Declaration to the writings of St. Robert Bellarmine on Church-State relations, particularly the separation between them.

For centuries the Church has implicitly — if not always explicitly — taught about the meaning of the social contract which, basically, can be said to be nothing more — or less — than the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

This rich history of social teaching developed by Popes especially in their encyclicals and related writings blossomed under Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), whose *Rerum Novarum* (*On Capital and Labor*), 1891, was called by Pope John XXIII the magna carta of Catholic social doctrine. The tradition that the Church is *Mater et Magistra* (*Mother and Teacher*) continues to be developed in our own day under the illuminating pen of Pope John Paul II.



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day under the illuminating pen of Pope John Paul II.

Despite the existence of this almost indispensable body of thought the sad fact is that it has been ignored more than studied, neglected more than implemented. To remedy this, especially among the leaders of the future — the young men and women of the new millennium — the Order has established the Knights of Columbus Essay Contest for students in the graduating classes of grammar and high schools. Under the overall rubric of *The Responsibility of the Catholic Citizen in a Free Society*, students will be asked to reflect on and write about a particular aspect of Catholic Social Teaching. Each year's specific topic is more particularly defined in materials about the competition made available to local schools.

To assist them in their reflection and study, we have collated this booklet comprised of excerpts from pertinent encyclicals and papal documents. Each student should find herein a ready source of reference to prompt the development of his or her essay.

It is our responsibility as laymen, as parents and as Knights of Columbus to help form our young people as responsible citizens of the City of God and the City of Man. May they, and we, come to understand through this program what it means to “render unto Caesar” what is his, and to “render unto God” what is His.

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**APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO COLOGNE  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE XX WORLD YOUTH DAY  
CELEBRATION WELCOMING THE YOUNG PEOPLE**

*Cologne - Poller Wiesen Thursday, 18 August 2005*

**ADDRESS OF HIS  
HOLINESS  
POPE BENEDICT XVI**



*Dear Young People,*

I am delighted to meet you here in Cologne on the banks of the Rhine! You have come from various parts of Germany, Europe and the rest of the world as pilgrims in the footsteps of the Magi.

Following their route, you too want to find Jesus. Like them, you have begun this journey in order to contemplate, both personally and with others, the face of God revealed by the Child in the manger.

Like yourselves, I too have set out to join you in kneeling before the consecrated white Host in

which the eyes of faith recognize the Real Presence of the Saviour of the world. Together, we will continue to meditate on the theme of this World Youth Day: “*We have come to worship him*” (Mt 2: 2).

With great joy I welcome you, dear young people. You have come here from near and far, walking the streets of the world and the pathways of life. My particular greeting goes to those who, like the Magi, have come from the East.



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**O**pen wide your hearts to God! Let yourselves be surprised by Christ! Let him have “the right of free speech” during these days!

Open the doors of your freedom to his merciful love! Share your joys and pains with Christ, and let him enlighten your minds with his light and touch your hearts with his grace.



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You are the representatives of so many of our brothers and sisters who are waiting, without realizing it, for the star to rise in their skies and lead them to Christ, Light of the Nations, in whom they will find the fullest response to their hearts' deepest desires.

I also greet with affection those among you who have not been baptized, and those of you who do not yet know Christ or have not yet found a home in his Church. Pope John Paul II had invited you in particular to come to this gathering; I thank you for deciding to come to Cologne.

Some of you might perhaps describe your adolescence in the words with which Edith Stein, who later lived in the Carmel in Cologne, described her own: "I consciously and deliberately lost the habit of praying." During these days, you can once again have a moving experience of prayer as dialogue with God, the God who we know loves us and whom we in turn wish to love.

To all of you I appeal: Open wide your hearts to God! Let yourselves be surprised by Christ! Let him have "the right of free speech" during these days!

Open the doors of your freedom to his merciful love! Share your joys and pains with Christ, and let him enlighten your minds with his light and touch your hearts with his grace.

In these days blessed with sharing and joy, may you have a liberating experience of the Church as the place where God's merciful love reaches out to all people. In the Church and through the Church you will meet Christ, who is waiting for you.

Today, as I arrived in Cologne to take part with you in the 20th World Youth Day, I naturally recall with deep gratitude the



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Servant of God so greatly loved by us all, Pope John Paul II, who had the inspired idea of calling young people from all over the world to join in celebrating Christ, the one Redeemer of the human race. Thanks to the profound dialogue which developed over more than 20 years between the Pope and young people, many of them were able to deepen their faith, forge bonds of communion, develop a love for the Good News of salvation in Christ and a desire to proclaim it throughout the world.

That great Pope understood the challenges faced by young people today, and, as a sign of his trust in them, he did not hesitate to spur them on to be courageous heralds of the Gospel and intrepid builders of the civilization of truth, love and peace.

Today, it is my turn to take up this extraordinary spiritual legacy bequeathed to us by Pope John Paul II. He loved you — you realized that and you returned his love with all your youthful enthusiasm. Now all of us together have to put his teaching into practice. It is this commitment which has brought us here to Cologne, as pilgrims in the footsteps of the Magi.

According to tradition, the names of the Magi in Greek were Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar. Matthew, in his Gospel, tells of the question which burned in the hearts of the Magi: “Where is the infant king of the Jews?” (Mt 2: 2). It was in order to search for him that they set out on the long journey to Jerusalem. This was why they withstood hardships and sacrifices, and never yielded to discouragement or the temptation to give up and go home. Now that they were close to their goal, they had no other question than this.

We too have come to Cologne because in our hearts we have



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the same urgent question that prompted the Magi from the East to set out on their journey, even if it is differently expressed.

It is true that today we are no longer looking for a king, but we are concerned for the state of the world and we are asking: “Where do I find standards to live by, what are the criteria that govern responsible cooperation in building the present and the future of our world? On whom can I rely? To whom shall I entrust myself? Where is the One who can offer me the response capable of satisfying my heart's deepest desires? ”

The fact that we ask questions like these means that we realize our journey is not over until we meet the One who has the power to establish that universal Kingdom of justice and peace to which all people aspire, but which they are unable to build by themselves. Asking such questions also means searching for Someone who can neither deceive nor be deceived, and who therefore can offer a certainty so solid that we can live for it and, if need be, even die for it.

Dear friends, when questions like these appear on the horizon of life, we must be able to make the necessary choices. It is like finding ourselves at a crossroads: which direction do we take? The one prompted by the passions or the one indicated by the star which shines in your conscience?

The Magi heard the answer: “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet” (Mt 2: 5), and, enlightened by these words, they chose to press forward to the very end. From Jerusalem they went on to Bethlehem. In other words, they went from the word which showed them where to find the King of the Jews whom they were seeking, all the way to the end, to an



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encounter with the King who was at the same time the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Those words are also spoken for us. We too have a choice to make. If we think about it, this is precisely our experience when we share in the Eucharist. For in every Mass the liturgy of the Word introduces us to our participation in the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ and hence, introduces us to the Eucharistic Meal, to union with Christ. Present on the altar is the One whom the Magi saw lying in the manger: Christ, the living Bread who came down from heaven to give life to the world, the true Lamb who gives his own life for the salvation of humanity.

Enlightened by the Word, it is in Bethlehem — the “House of Bread” — that we can always encounter the inconceivable greatness of a God who humbled himself even to appearing in a manger, to giving himself as food on the altar.

We can imagine the awe which the Magi experienced before the Child in swaddling clothes. Only faith enabled them to recognize in the face of that Child the King whom they were seeking, the God to whom the star had guided them. In him, crossing the abyss between the finite and the infinite, the visible and the invisible, the Eternal entered time, the Mystery became known by entrusting himself to us in the frail body of a small child.

“The Magi are filled with awe by what they see; heaven on earth and earth in heaven; man in God and God in man; they see enclosed in a tiny body the One whom the entire world cannot contain”(*St Peter Chrysologus*, Sermon 160, n. 2).

In these days, during this “Year of the Eucharist”, we will turn with the same awe to Christ present in the Tabernacle of Mercy,



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in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Dear young people, the happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy has a name and a face: it is Jesus of Nazareth, hidden in the Eucharist. Only he gives the fullness of life to humanity! With Mary, say your own “yes” to God, for he wishes to give himself to you.

I repeat today what I said at the beginning of my Pontificate: “If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation” (*Homily at the Mass of Inauguration, 24 April 2005*).

Be completely convinced of this: Christ takes from you nothing that is beautiful and great, but brings everything to perfection for the glory of God, the happiness of men and women, and the salvation of the world.

In these days I encourage you to commit yourselves without reserve to serving Christ, whatever the cost. The encounter with Jesus Christ will allow you to experience in your hearts the joy of his living and life-giving presence, and enable you to bear witness to it before others. Let your presence in this city be the first sign and proclamation of the Gospel, thanks to the witness of your actions and your joy.

Let us raise our hearts in a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Father for the many blessings he has given us and for the gift of faith which we will celebrate together, making it manifest to the world from this land in the heart of Europe, a Europe



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which owes so much to the Gospel and its witnesses down the centuries.

And now I shall go as a pilgrim to the Cathedral of Cologne, to venerate the relics of the holy Magi who left everything to follow the star which was guiding them to the Saviour of the human race. You too, dear young people, have already had, or will have, the opportunity to make the same pilgrimage.

These relics are only the poor and frail sign of what those men were and what they experienced so many centuries ago. The relics direct us towards God himself: it is he who, by the power of his grace, grants to weak human beings the courage to bear witness to him before the world.

By inviting us to venerate the mortal remains of the martyrs and saints, the Church does not forget that, in the end, these are indeed just human bones, but they are bones that belonged to individuals touched by the living power of God. The relics of the saints are traces of that invisible but real presence which sheds light upon the shadows of the world and reveals the Kingdom of Heaven in our midst. They cry out with us and for us: "Maranatha!" — "Come, Lord Jesus!". My dear friends, I make these words my farewell, and I invite you to the Saturday evening Vigil. I shall see you then!

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## Centesimus Annus

**JOHN PAUL II ENCYCLICAL**  
*CENTESIMUS ANNUS*  
**ON THE 100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF**  
*RERUM NOVARUM*  
**ON CAPITAL AND LABOR**  
**Pope Leo XIII**  
**MAY 1, 1991**

39. The first and fundamental structure for “human ecology” is the family, in which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person. Here we mean the family founded on marriage, in which the mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny. But it often happens that people are discouraged from creating the proper conditions for human reproduction and are led to consider themselves and their lives as a series of sensations to be experienced rather than as a work to be accomplished. The result is a lack of freedom, which causes a person to reject a commitment to enter into a stable relationship with another person and to bring children into the world, or which leads people to consider children as one of the many “things” which an individual can have or not have, according to taste, and which compete with other possibilities.

It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the sanctuary of life. The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life



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— the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life.

Human ingenuity seems to be directed more towards limiting, suppressing or destroying the sources of life — including recourse to abortion, which unfortunately is so widespread in the world — than towards defending and opening up the possibilities of life. The Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* [On Social Concerns, (marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pope Paul VI's Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, 1967), Pope John Paul II, December 30, 1987] denounced systematic anti-childbearing campaigns which, on the basis of a distorted view of the demographic problem and in a climate of “absolute lack of respect for the freedom of choice of the parties involved,” often subject them “to intolerable pressures ... in order to force them to submit to this new form of oppression.”<sup>78</sup> These policies are extending their field of action by the use of new techniques, to the point of poisoning the lives of millions of defenseless human beings, as if in a form of “chemical warfare.”

These criticisms are directed not so much against an economic system as against an ethical and cultural system. The economy in fact is only one aspect and one dimension of the whole of human activity. If economic life is absolutized, if the production and consumption of goods become the centre of social life and society's only value, not subject to any other value, the reason is to be found not so much in the economic sys-



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tem itself as in the fact that the entire socio-cultural system, by ignoring the ethical and religious dimension, has been weakened, and ends by limiting itself to the production of goods and services alone.<sup>79</sup>

All of this can be summed up by repeating once more that economic freedom is only one element of human freedom. When it becomes autonomous, when man is seen more as a producer or consumer of goods than as a subject who produces and consumes in order to live, then economic freedom loses its necessary relationship to the human person and ends up by alienating and oppressing him.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 25: *loc. cit.*, 544

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 34: *loc. cit.*, 559f

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (Pope John Paul II, 4 March 1979), 15: *AAS* 71 (1979), 286-289



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### JOHN PAUL II POST-SYNODAL EXHORTATION

#### *CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI*

#### THE VOCATION AND THE MISSION

#### OF THE LAY FAITHFUL

#### IN THE CHURCH

#### AND IN THE MODERN WORLD

DECEMBER 30, 1988

### **Promoting the Dignity of the Person**

37. To rediscover and make others rediscover the inviolable dignity of every human person makes up an essential task, in a certain sense, the central and unifying task of the service which the Church, and the lay faithful in her, are called to render to the human family.

Among all other earthly beings, only a man or a woman is a “person,” a conscious and free being and, precisely for this reason, the “center and summit” of all that exists on the earth.<sup>135</sup>

The dignity of the person is the most precious possession of an individual. As a result, the value of one person transcends all the material world. The words of Jesus, “For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and to forfeit his life?” (Mk 8:36) contain an enlightening and stirring statement about the individual: value comes not from what a person “has” even if the person possessed the whole world! — as much as from what a person “is:” the goods of the world do not count as much as the good of the person, the good which is the person individually.

The dignity of the person is manifested in all its radiance



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when the person's origin and destiny are considered: created by God in his image and likeness as well as redeemed by the most precious blood of Christ, the person is called to be a "child in the Son" and a living temple of the Spirit, destined for the eternal life of blessed communion with God. For this reason every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offense against the Creator of the individual.

In virtue of a personal dignity the human being is always a value as an individual, and as such demands being considered and treated as a person and never, on the contrary, considered and treated as an object to be used, or as a means, or as a thing.

The dignity of the person constitutes the foundation of the equality of all people among themselves. As a result all forms of discrimination are totally unacceptable, especially those forms which unfortunately continue to divide and degrade the human family, from those based on race or economics to those social and cultural, from political to geographic, etc. Each discrimination constitutes an absolutely intolerable injustice, not so much for the tensions and the conflicts that can be generated in the social sphere, as much as for the dishonor inflicted on the dignity of the person: not only to the dignity of the individual who is the victim of the injustice, but still more to the one who commits the injustice.

Just as personal dignity is the foundation of equality of all people among themselves, so it is also the foundation of participation and solidarity of all people among themselves: dialogue and communion are rooted ultimately in what people "are," first and foremost, rather than on what people "have."



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The dignity of the person is the indestructible property of every human being. The force of this affirmation is based on the uniqueness and irrepeatability of every person. From it flows that the individual can never be reduced by all that seeks to crush and to annihilate the person into the anonymity that comes from collectivity, institutions, structures and systems. As an individual, a person is not a number or simply a link in a chain, nor even less, an impersonal element in some system. The most radical and elevating affirmation of the value of every human being was made by the Son of God in his becoming man in the womb of a woman, as we continue to be reminded each Christmas.<sup>136</sup>

### **Respecting the Inviolable Right to Life**

**38.** In effect the acknowledgment of the personal dignity of every human being demands the respect, the defense and the promotion of the rights of the human person. It is a question of inherent, universal and inviolable rights. No one, no individual, no group, no authority, no State, can change — let alone eliminate — them because such rights find their source in God himself.

The inviolability of the person which is a reflection of the absolute inviolability of God, finds its primary and fundamental expression in the inviolability of human life. Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights — for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture — is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is



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not defended with maximum determination.

The Church has never yielded in the face of all the violations that the right to life of every human being has received, and continues to receive, both from individuals and from those in authority. The human being is entitled to such rights, in every phase of development, from conception until natural death; and in every condition, whether healthy or sick, whole or handicapped, rich or poor. The Second Vatican Council openly proclaimed: "All offenses against life itself, such as every kind of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons; all these and the like are certainly criminal: they poison human society; and they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator."<sup>137</sup>

If, indeed, everyone has the mission and responsibility of acknowledging the personal dignity of every human being and of defending the right to life, some lay faithful are given a particular title to this task: such as parents, teachers, health workers and the many who hold economic and political power.

The Church today lives a fundamental aspect of her mission in lovingly and generously accepting every human being, especially those who are weak and sick. This is made all the more nec-



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essary as a “culture of death” threatens to take control. In fact, “the Church family believes that human life, even if weak and suffering, is always a wonderful gift of God’s goodness. Against the pessimism and selfishness which casts a shadow over the world, the Church stands for life: in each human life she sees the splendor of that ‘Yes,’ that ‘Amen,’ which is Christ himself (cf. 2 Cor 1:19; Rev 3:14). To the ‘No’ which assails and afflicts the world, she replies with this living ‘Yes,’ this defending of the human person and the world from all who plot against life.”<sup>138</sup> It is the responsibility of the lay faithful, who more directly through their vocation or their profession are involved in accepting life, to make the Church’s “Yes” to human life concrete and efficacious.

The enormous development of biological and medical science, united to an amazing power in technology, today provides possibilities on the very frontier of human life which imply new responsibilities. In fact, today humanity is in the position not only of “observing” but even “exercising a control over” human life at its very beginning and in its first stages of development.

The moral conscience of humanity is not able to turn aside or remain indifferent in the face of these gigantic strides accomplished by a technology that is acquiring a continually more extensive and profound dominion over the working processes that govern procreation and the first phases of human life. Today as perhaps never before in history or in this field, wisdom shows itself to be the only firm basis to salvation, in that persons engaged in scientific research and in its application are always to act with intelligence and love, that is, respecting, even remaining in veneration of, the inviolable dignity of the personhood of every



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human being, from the first moment of life's existence. This occurs when science and technology are committed with licit means to the defense of life and the cure of disease in its beginnings, refusing on the contrary — even for the dignity of research itself — to perform operations that result in falsifying the genetic patrimony of the individual and of human generative power.<sup>139</sup>

The lay faithful, having responsibility in various capacities and at different levels of science as well as in the medical, social, legislative and economic fields must courageously accept the “challenge” posed by new problems in bioethics. The Synod Fathers used these words: “Christians ought to exercise their responsibilities as masters of science and technology, and not become their slaves ... In view of the moral challenges presented by enormous new technological power, endangering not only fundamental human rights but the very biological essence of the human species, it is of utmost importance that lay Christians with the help of the universal Church — take up the task of calling culture back to the principles of an authentic humanism, giving a dynamic and sure foundation to the promotion and defense of the rights of the human being in one's very essence, an essence which the preaching of the Gospel reveals to all.”<sup>140</sup>

Today maximum vigilance must be exercised by everyone in the face of the phenomenon of the concentration of power and technology. In fact such a concentration has a tendency to manipulate not only the biological essence but the very content of people's consciences and life styles, thereby worsening the condition of entire peoples by discrimination and marginalization.



### **Public Life: for Everyone and by Everyone**

**42.** A charity that loves and serves the person is never able to be separated from justice. Each in its own way demands the full, effective acknowledgment of the rights of the individual to which society is ordered in all its structures and institutions.<sup>149</sup> In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in “public life,” that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good.

The Synod Fathers have repeatedly affirmed that every person has a right and duty to participate in public life, albeit in a diversity and complementarity of forms, levels, tasks and responsibilities. Charges of careerism, idolatry of power, egoism and corruption that are oftentimes directed at persons in government, parliaments, the ruling classes, or political parties, as well as the common opinion that participating in politics is an absolute moral danger, does not in the least justify either skepticism or an absence on the part of Christians in public life. On the contrary, the Second Vatican Council’s words are particularly significant: “The Church regards as worthy of praise and consideration the work of those who, as a service to others, dedicate themselves to the public good of the state and undertake the burdens of this task.”<sup>150</sup>

Public life on behalf of the person and society finds its basic standard in the pursuit of the common good, as the good of every-



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one and as the good of each person taken as a whole, which is guaranteed and offered in a fitting manner to people, both as individuals and in groups, for their free and responsible acceptance.

“The political community”— we read in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* — “exists for that common good in which the community finds its full justification and meaning, and from which it derives its basic, proper and lawful arrangement. The common good embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life by which individuals, families, and organizations can achieve more thoroughly their own fulfillment.”<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, public life on behalf of the person and society finds its continuous line of action in the defense and the promotion of justice, understood to be a “virtue,” an understanding which requires education, as well as a moral “force” that sustains the obligation to foster the rights and duties of each and everyone, based on the personal dignity of each human being.

The spirit of service is a fundamental element in the exercise of political power. This spirit of service, together with the necessary competence and efficiency, can make “virtuous” or “above criticism” the activity of persons in public life which is justly demanded by the rest of the people. To accomplish this requires a full-scale battle and a determination to overcome every temptation, such as the recourse to disloyalty and to falsehood, the waste of public funds for the advantage of a few and those with special interests, and the use of ambiguous and illicit means for acquiring, maintaining and increasing power at any cost.

The lay faithful given a charge in public life certainly ought to respect the autonomy of earthly realities properly understood, as



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we read in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: “It is of great importance, especially in a pluralistic society, to work out a proper vision of the relationship between the political community and the Church, and to distinguish clearly between the activities of Christians, acting individually or collectively, in their own name as citizens guided by the dictates of a Christian conscience, and their activity in communion with their Pastors in the name of the Church. The Church by reason of her role and competence, is not identified with any political community nor bound by ties to any political system. She is at once the sign and the safeguard of the transcendental dimension of the human person.”<sup>152</sup>

At the same time — and this is felt today as a pressing responsibility — the lay faithful must bear witness to those human and gospel values that are intimately connected with political activity itself, such as liberty and justice, solidarity, faithful and unselfish dedication for the good of all, a simple life-style, and a preferential love for the poor and the least. This demands that the lay faithful always be more animated by a real participation in the life of the Church and enlightened by her social doctrine. In this they can be supported and helped by the nearness of the Christian community and their pastors.<sup>153</sup>

The manner and means for achieving a public life which has true human development as its goal is solidarity. This concerns the active and responsible participation of all in public life, from individual citizens to various groups, from labor unions to political parties. All of us, each and everyone, are the goal of public life as well as its leading participants. In this environment, as I wrote in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, solidarity “is not a feeling of



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vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all.”<sup>154</sup>

Today political solidarity requires going beyond single nations or a single block of nations, to a consideration on a properly continental and world level.

The fruit of sound political activity, which is so much desired by everyone but always lacking in advancement, is peace. The lay faithful cannot remain indifferent or be strangers and inactive in the face of all that denies and compromises peace, namely, violence and war, torture and terrorism, concentration camps, militarization of public life, the arms race, and the nuclear threat. On the contrary, as disciples of Jesus Christ, “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5) and “Our Peace,” (Eph 2:14) the lay faithful ought to take upon themselves the task of being “peacemakers” (Mt 5:9), both through a conversion of “heart,” justice and charity, all of which are the undeniable foundation of peace.<sup>155</sup>

The lay faithful in working together with all those that truly seek peace and themselves serving in specific organizations as well as national and international institutions, ought to promote an extensive work of education intended to defeat the ruling culture of egoism, hate, the vendetta and hostility, and thereby to develop the culture of solidarity at every level. Such solidarity, in fact, “is the way to peace and at the same time to development.”<sup>156</sup>

From this perspective the Synod Fathers have invited Christians to reject as unacceptable all forms of violence, to pro-



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mote attitudes of dialogue and peace and to commit themselves to establish a just inter-national and social order.<sup>157</sup>

- 135 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 12
- 136 “If we celebrate so solemnly the birth of Jesus, we do it so as to bear witness to the fact that each person is someone, unique and irrepeatable, If humanity’s statistics and arrangement, its political, economic and social systems as well as its simple possibilities, do not come about to assure man that he can be born, exist and work as a unique and irrepeatable individual, then bid ‘farewell’ to all assurances. For Christ and because of him, the individual is always unique and irrepeatable; someone externally conceived and externally chosen; someone called and given a special name” (John Paul II, First Christmas Radio Message to the World: *AAS* 71 [1979], (66).
- 137 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 27.
- 138 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 30: *AAS* 74 (1982), 116.
- 139 Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day *Donum Vitae* (11 March 1987): *AAS* 80 (1988), 70-102.
- 140 Propositio 36.
- 149 For the relationship between justice and mercy, see John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 12: *AAS* 72 (1980), 1215-1217
- 150 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 75
- 151 *Ibid.*, 74
- 152 *Ibid.*, 76
- 153 Cf. Propositio 28.
- 154 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38: *AAS* 80 (1988), 565-566
- 155 Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*: *AAS* 55 (1963), 265 - 266.
- 156 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39: *AAS* 80 (1988), 56e
- 157 Cf. Propositio 26.



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**F**undamentally, democracy is a “system” and as such is a means and not an end. Its “moral” value is not automatic, but depends on conformity to the moral law to which it, like every other form of human behavior, must be subject: in other words, its morality depends on the morality of the ends which it pursues and of the means which it employs. — *Evangelium Vitae* 70



## Evangelium Vitae

**POPE JOHN PAUL II ENCYCLICAL**  
*EVANGELIUM VITAE,*  
**THE GOSPEL OF LIFE**  
**(ON THE VALUE AND INVIOABILITY**  
**OF HUMAN LIFE)**  
**March 25, 1995**

**34.** Life is always a good. This is an instinctive perception and a fact of experience, and man is called to grasp the profound reason why this is so.

Why is life a good? This question is found everywhere in the Bible, and from the very first pages it receives a powerful and amazing answer. The life which God gives man is quite different from the life of all other living creatures, inasmuch as man, although formed from the dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7, 3:19; Job 34:15; Ps 103:14; 104:29), is a manifestation of God in the world, a sign of his presence, a trace of his glory (cf. Gen 1:26-27; Ps 8:6). This is what Saint Irenaeus of Lyons wanted to emphasize in his celebrated definition: "Man, living man, is the glory of God."<sup>23</sup> Man has been given a sublime dignity, based on the intimate bond which unites him to his Creator: in man there shines forth a reflection of God himself.

The Book of Genesis affirms this when, in the first account of creation, it places man at the summit of God's creative activity, as its crown, at the culmination of a process which leads from indistinct chaos to the most perfect of creatures. Everything in creation is ordered to man and everything is made subject to him: "Fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over . . .



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every living thing” (1:28); this is God’s command to the man and the woman. A similar message is found also in the other account of creation: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). We see here a clear affirmation of the primacy of man over things; these are made subject to him and entrusted to his responsible care, whereas for no reason can he be made subject to other men and almost reduced to the level of a thing.

In the biblical narrative, the difference between man and other creatures is shown above all by the fact that only the creation of man is presented as the result of a special decision on the part of God, a deliberation to establish a particular and specific bond with the Creator: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26). The life which God offers to man is a gift by which God shares something of himself with his creature. Israel would ponder at length the meaning of this particular bond between man and God. The Book of Sirach too recognizes that God, in creating human beings, “endowed them with strength like his own, and made them in his own image” (17:3). The biblical author sees as part of this image not only man’s dominion over the world but also those spiritual faculties which are distinctively human, such as reason, discernment between good and evil, and free will: “He filled them with knowledge and understanding, and showed them good and evil” (Sir 17:7). The ability to attain truth and freedom are human prerogatives inasmuch as man is created in the image of his Creator, God who is true and just (cf. Dt 32:4). Man alone, among all visible creatures, is “capable of knowing and loving his Creator.”<sup>24</sup> The life which



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God bestows upon man is much more than mere existence in time. It is a drive towards fullness of life; it is the seed of an existence which transcends the very limits of time: “For God created man for in-corruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity” (Wis 2:23).

**40.** The sacredness of life gives rise to its inviolability, written from the beginning in man’s heart, in his conscience. The question: “What have you done?” (Gen 4:10), which God addresses to Cain after he has killed his brother Abel, interprets the experience of every person: in the depths of his conscience, man is always reminded of the inviolability of life — his own life and that of others — as something which does not belong to him, because it is the property and gift of God the Creator and Father.

The commandment regarding the inviolability of human life reverberates at the heart of the “ten words” in the covenant of Sinai (cf. Ex 34:28). In the first place that commandment prohibits murder: “You shall not kill;” (Ex 20:13) “do not slay the innocent and righteous” (Ex 23:7). But, as is brought out in Israel’s later legislation, it also prohibits all personal injury inflicted on another (cf. Ex 21:12-27). Of course we must recognize that in the Old Testament this sense of the value of life, though already quite marked, does not yet reach the refinement found in the Sermon on the Mount. This is apparent in some aspects of the current penal legislation, which provide for severe forms of corporal punishment and even the death penalty. But the overall message, which the New Testament will bring to perfection, is a forceful appeal for respect for the inviolability of physical life



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and the integrity of the person. It culminates in the positive commandment which obliges us to be responsible for our neighbor as for ourselves: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Lev 19:18)

68. One of the specific characteristics of present-day attacks on human life — as has already been said several times — consists in the trend to demand a legal justification for them, as if they were rights which the State, at least under certain conditions, must acknowledge as belonging to citizens. Consequently, there is a tendency to claim that it should be possible to exercise these rights with the safe and free assistance of doctors and medical personnel.

It is often claimed that the life of an unborn child or a seriously disabled person is only a relative good: according to a proportionalist approach, or one of sheer calculation, this good should be compared with and balanced against other goods. It is even maintained that only someone present and personally involved in a concrete situation can correctly judge the goods at stake: consequently, only that person would be able to decide on the morality of his choice. The State therefore, in the interest of civil coexistence and social harmony, should respect this choice, even to the point of permitting abortion and euthanasia.

At other times, it is claimed that civil law cannot demand that all citizens should live according to moral standards higher than what all citizens themselves acknowledge and share. Hence the law should always express the opinion and will of the majority of citizens and recognize that they have, at least in certain



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extreme cases, the right even to abortion and euthanasia. Moreover the prohibition and the punishment of abortion and euthanasia in these cases would inevitably lead — so it is said — to an increase of illegal practices: and these would not be subject to necessary control by society and would be carried out in a medically unsafe way. The question is also raised whether supporting a law which in practice cannot be enforced would not ultimately undermine the authority of all laws.

Finally, the more radical views go so far as to maintain that in a modern and pluralistic society people should be allowed complete freedom to dispose of their own lives as well as of the lives of the unborn: it is asserted that it is not the task of the law to choose between different moral opinions, and still less can the law claim to impose one particular opinion to the detriment of others.

**69.** In any case, in the democratic culture of our time it is commonly held that the legal system of any society should limit itself to taking account of and accepting the convictions of the majority. It should therefore be based solely upon what the majority itself considers moral and actually practices. Furthermore, if it is believed that an objective truth shared by all is de facto unattainable, then respect for the freedom of the citizens — who in a democratic system are considered the true rulers — would require that on the legislative level the autonomy of individual consciences be acknowledged. Consequently, when establishing those norms which are absolutely necessary for social coexistence, the only determining factor should be the will of the



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majority, whatever this may be. Hence every politician, in his or her activity, should clearly separate the realm of private conscience from that of public conduct.

As a result we have what appear to be two diametrically opposed tendencies. On the one hand, individuals claim for themselves in the moral sphere the most complete freedom of choice and demand that the State should not adopt or impose any ethical position but limit itself to guaranteeing maximum space for the freedom of each individual, with the sole limitation of not infringing on the freedom and rights of any other citizen. On the other hand, it is held that, in the exercise of public and professional duties, respect for other people's freedom of choice requires that each one should set aside his or her own convictions in order to satisfy every demand of the citizens which is recognized and guaranteed by law; in carrying out one's duties the only moral criterion should be what is laid down by the law itself. Individual responsibility is thus turned over to the civil law, with a renouncing of personal conscience, at least in the public sphere.

**70.** At the basis of all these tendencies lies the ethical relativism which characterizes much of present-day culture. There are those who consider such relativism an essential condition of democracy, inasmuch as it alone is held to guarantee tolerance, mutual respect between people and acceptance of the decisions of the majority, whereas moral norms considered to be objective and binding are held to lead to authoritarianism and intolerance.

But it is precisely the issue of respect for life which shows



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what misunderstandings and contradictions, accompanied by terrible practical consequences, are concealed in this position. It is true that history has known cases where crimes have been committed in the name of “truth.” But equally grave crimes and radical denials of freedom have also been committed and are still being committed in the name of “ethical relativism.” When a parliamentary or social majority decrees that it is legal, at least under certain conditions, to kill unborn human life, is it not really making a “tyrannical” decision with regard to the weakest and most defenseless of human beings? Everyone’s conscience rightly rejects those crimes against humanity of which our century has had such sad experience. But would these crimes cease to be crimes if, instead of being committed by unscrupulous tyrants, they were legitimated by popular consensus?

Democracy cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality or a panacea for immorality. Fundamentally, democracy is a “system” and as such is a means and not an end. Its “moral” value is not automatic, but depends on conformity to the moral law to which it, like every other form of human behavior, must be subject: in other words, its morality depends on the morality of the ends which it pursues and of the means which it employs. If today we see an almost universal consensus with regard to the value of democracy, this is to be considered a positive “sign of the times,” as the Church’s Magisterium has frequently noted.<sup>88</sup> But the value of democracy stands or falls with the values which it embodies and promotes. Of course, values such as the dignity of every human person, respect for inviolable and inalienable human rights, and the adoption of the



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“common good” as the end and criterion regulating political life are certainly fundamental and not to be ignored.

The basis of these values cannot be provisional and changeable “majority” opinions, but only the acknowledgment of an objective moral law which, as the “natural law” written in the human heart, is the obligatory point of reference for civil law itself. If, as a result of a tragic obscuring of the collective conscience, an attitude of skepticism were to succeed in bringing into question even the fundamental principles of the moral law, the democratic system itself would be shaken in its foundations, and would be reduced to a mere mechanism for regulating different and opposing interests on a purely empirical basis.<sup>89</sup>

Some might think that even this function, in the absence of anything better, should be valued for the sake of peace in society. While one acknowledges some element of truth in this point of view, it is easy to see that without an objective moral grounding not even democracy is capable of ensuring a stable peace, especially since peace which is not built upon the values of the dignity of every individual and of solidarity between all people frequently proves to be illusory. Even in participatory systems of government, the regulation of interests often occurs to the advantage of the most powerful, since they are the ones most capable of maneuvering not only the levers of power but also of shaping the formation of consensus. In such a situation, democracy easily becomes an empty word.

**71.** It is therefore urgently necessary, for the future of society and the development of a sound democracy, to rediscover those



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essential and innate human and moral values which 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, but must only acknowledge, respect and promote.

Consequently there is a need to recover the basic elements of a vision of the relationship between civil law and moral law, which are put forward by the Church, but which are also part of the patrimony of the great juridical traditions of humanity.

Certainly the purpose of civil law is different and more limited in scope than that of the moral law. But “in no sphere of life can the civil law take the place of conscience or dictate norms concerning things which are outside its competence,”<sup>90</sup> which is that of ensuring the common good of people through the recognition and defense of their fundamental rights, and the promotion of peace and of public morality.<sup>91</sup> The real purpose of civil law is to guarantee an ordered social coexistence in true justice, so that all may “lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.” (1 Tim 2:2). Precisely for this reason, civil law must ensure that all members of society enjoy respect for certain fundamental rights which innately belong to the person, rights which every positive law must recognize and guarantee. First and fundamental among these is the inviolable right to life of every innocent human being. While public authority can sometimes choose not to put a stop to something which — were it prohibited — would cause more serious harm,<sup>92</sup> it can never presume to legitimize as a right of individuals — even if they are the majority of the members of society — an offense against



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other persons caused by the disregard of so fundamental a right as the right to life. The legal toleration of abortion or of euthanasia can in no way claim to be based on respect for the conscience of others, precisely because society has the right and the duty to protect itself against the abuses which can occur in the name of conscience and under the pretext of freedom.<sup>93</sup> In the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII pointed out that “it is generally accepted today that the common good is best safeguarded when personal rights and duties are guaranteed. The chief concern of civil authorities must therefore be to ensure that these rights are recognized, respected, coordinated, defended and promoted, and that each individual is enabled to perform his duties more easily. For ‘to safeguard the inviolable rights of the human person, and to facilitate the performance of his duties, is the principal duty of every public authority.’ Thus any government which refused to recognize human rights or acted in violation of them, would not only fail in its duty; its decrees would be wholly lacking in binding force.”<sup>94</sup>

72. The doctrine on the necessary conformity of civil law with the moral law is in continuity with the whole tradition of the Church. This is clear once more from John XXIII’s Encyclical: “Authority is a postulate of the moral order and derives from God. Consequently, laws and decrees enacted in contravention of the moral order, and hence of the divine will, can have no binding force in conscience...; indeed, the passing of such laws undermines the very nature of authority and results in shameful abuse.”<sup>95</sup> This is the clear teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who



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writes that “human law is law inasmuch as it is in conformity with right reason and thus derives from the eternal law. But when a law is contrary to reason, it is called an unjust law; but in this case it ceases to be a law and becomes instead an act of violence.”<sup>96</sup> And again: “Every law made by man can be called a law insofar as it derives from the natural law. But if it is somehow opposed to the natural law, then it is not really a law but rather a corruption of the law.”<sup>97</sup>

Now the first and most immediate application of this teaching concerns a human law which disregards the fundamental right and source of all other rights which is the right to life, a right belonging to every individual. Consequently, laws which legitimize the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion or euthanasia are in complete opposition to the inviolable right to life proper to every individual; they thus deny the equality of everyone before the law. It might be objected that such is not the case in euthanasia, when it is requested with full awareness by the person involved. But any State which made such a request legitimate and authorized it to be carried out would be legalizing a case of suicide-murder, contrary to the fundamental principles of absolute respect for life and of the protection of every innocent life. In this way the State contributes to lessening respect for life and opens the door to ways of acting which are destructive of trust in relations between people. Laws which authorize and promote abortion and euthanasia are therefore radically opposed not only to the good of the individual but also to the common good; as such they are completely lacking in authentic juridical validity. Disregard for the right to life, precisely



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because it leads to the killing of the person whom society exists to serve, is what most directly conflicts with the possibility of achieving the common good. Consequently, a civil law authorizing abortion or euthanasia ceases by that very fact to be a true, morally binding civil law.

*"You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (LK 10:27): "Promote" life*

**75.** God's commandments teach us the way of life. The negative moral precepts, which declare that the choice of certain actions is morally unacceptable, have an absolute value for human freedom: they are valid always and everywhere, without exception. They make it clear that the choice of certain ways of acting is radically incompatible with the love of God and with the dignity of the person created in his image. Such choices cannot be redeemed by the goodness of any intention or of any consequence; they are irrevocably opposed to the bond between persons; they contradict the fundamental decision to direct one's life to God.<sup>99</sup>

In this sense, the negative moral precepts have an extremely important positive function. The "no" which they unconditionally require makes clear the absolute limit beneath which free individuals cannot lower themselves. At the same time they indicate the minimum which they must respect and from which they must start out in order to say "yes" over and over again, a "yes" which will gradually embrace the entire horizon of the good (cf. Mt 5:48). The commandments, in particular the negative moral precepts, are the beginning and the first necessary stage of the journey towards freedom. As Saint Augustine writes, "the begin-



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ning of freedom is to be free from crimes... like murder, adultery, fornication, theft, fraud, sacrilege and so forth. Only when one stops committing these crimes (and no Christian should commit them), one begins to lift up one's head towards freedom. But this is only the beginning of freedom, not perfect freedom."<sup>100</sup>

76. The commandment "You shall not kill" thus establishes the point of departure for the start of true freedom. It leads us to promote life actively, and to develop particular ways of thinking and acting which serve life. In this way we exercise our responsibility towards the persons entrusted to us and we show, in deeds and in truth, our gratitude to God for the great gift of life (cf. Ps 139:13-14).

The Creator has entrusted man's life to his responsible concern, not to make arbitrary use of it, but to preserve it with wisdom and to care for it with loving fidelity. The God of the Covenant has entrusted the life of every individual to his or her fellow human beings, brothers and sisters, according to the law of reciprocity in giving and receiving, of self-giving and of the acceptance of others. In the fullness of time, by taking flesh and giving his life for us, the Son of God showed what heights and depths this law of reciprocity can reach. With the gift of his Spirit, Christ gives new content and meaning to the law of reciprocity, to our being entrusted to one another. The Spirit who builds up communion in love creates between us a new fraternity and solidarity, a true reflection of the mystery of mutual self-giving and receiving proper to the Most Holy Trinity. The Spirit becomes the new law which gives strength to believers and



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awakens in them a responsibility for sharing the gift of self and for accepting others, as a sharing in the boundless love of Jesus Christ himself.

*“Your children will be like olive shoots around your table: (Ps 128:3):*

*The family as the “sanctuary of life:*

**92.** Within the “people of life and the people for life,” the family has a decisive responsibility. This responsibility flows from its very nature as a community of life and love, founded upon marriage, and from its mission to “guard, reveal and communicate love.”<sup>117</sup> Here it is a matter of God’s own love, of which parents are co-workers and as it were interpreters when they transmit life and raise it according to his fatherly plan.<sup>118</sup> This is the love that becomes selflessness, receptiveness and gift. Within the family each member is accepted, respected and honored precisely because he or she is a person; and if any family member is in greater need, the care which he or she receives is all the more intense and attentive.

The family has a special role to play throughout the life of its members, from birth to death. It is truly “the sanctuary of life: the place in which life — the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth.”<sup>119</sup> Consequently the role of the family in building a culture of life is decisive and irreplaceable.

As the domestic church, the family is summoned to proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life. This is a responsibility which first concerns married couples, called to be givers of life, on the basis of an ever greater awareness of the meaning of procreation as a unique event which clearly reveals that human life is a gift



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received in order then to be given as a gift. In giving origin to a new life, parents recognize that the child, “as the fruit of their mutual gift of love, is, in turn, a gift for both of them, a gift which flows from them.”<sup>120</sup>

*“We are writing this that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:4):*

*The Gospel of life is for the whole of human society*

**101.** “We are writing you this that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:4). The revelation of the Gospel of life is given to us as a good to be shared with all people: so that all men and women may have fellowship with us and with the Trinity (cf. 1 Jn 1:3). Our own joy would not be complete if we failed to share this Gospel with others but kept it only for ourselves.

The Gospel of life is not for believers alone: it is for everyone. The issue of life and its defense and promotion is not a concern of Christians alone. Although faith provides special light and strength, this question arises in every human conscience which seeks the truth and which cares about the future of humanity. Life certainly has a sacred religious value, but in no way is that value a concern only of believers. The value at stake is one which every human being can grasp by the light of reason; thus it necessarily concerns everyone.

Consequently, all that we do as the “people of life and for life” should be interpreted correctly and welcomed with favor. When the Church declares that unconditional respect for the right to life of every innocent person — from conception to natural death — is one of the pillars on which every civil society stands, she “wants simply to promote a human State. A State which recognizes the defense of the fundamental rights of the human person, especially of the weakest, as



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its primary duty.”<sup>136</sup>

The Gospel of life is for the whole of human society. To be actively pro-life is to contribute to the renewal of society through the promotion of the common good. It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop. A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized. Only respect for life can be the foundation and guarantee of the most precious and essential goods of society, such as democracy and peace.

There can be no true democracy without a recognition of every person’s dignity and without respect for his or her rights.

Nor can there be true peace unless life is defended and promoted. As Paul VI pointed out: “Every crime against life is an attack on peace, especially if it strikes at the moral conduct of people... But where human rights are truly professed and publicly recognized and defended, peace becomes the joyful and operative climate of life in society.”<sup>137</sup>

The “people of life” rejoice in being able to share its commitment with so many others. Thus may the “people for life” constantly grow in number and may a new culture of love and solidarity develop for the true good of the whole of human society.

<sup>23</sup> “Gloria Dei vivens homo”: *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 20, 7: Sch 100/2, 648-649

<sup>24</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 12.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 46: *AAS* 83 (1991), 850; Pius XII, Christmas Radio Message (24 December 1944): *AAS* 37 (1945) 10-20.



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- 89 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 97 and 99: *AAS* 85 (1993), 1209-1211.
- 90 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Respect for Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation *Donum Vitae* (22 February 1987), III: *AAS* 80 (1988), 98.
- 91 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7.
- 92 Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae I-II*, q. 96, a. 2.
- 93 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 7.
- 94 Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (11 April 1963), II: *AAS* 55 (1963), 273 - 274 The internal quote is from Pius XII, Radio Message of Pentecost 1941 (1 June 1941): *AAS* 33 (1941), 200. On this topic, the Encyclical cites: Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Mit brennender Sorge* (14 March 1937): *AAS* 29 (1937), 159; Encyclical Letter *Divini Redemptoris* (19 March 1937), III: *AAS* 29 (1937), 79; Pius XII, Christmas Radio Message (24 December 1942): *AAS* 35 (1943), 9-24.
- 95 Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (11 April 1963), II: loc cit., 271.
- 96 *Summa Theologiae, I-II*, q. 93, a. 3, ad 2um.
- 97 *Ibid.*, I-11, q. 95, a. 2. Aquinas quotes Saint Augustine: "Non videtur esse lex, quae iusta non fuerit", *De Libero Arbitrio*, I, 5, 11: PL 32. 1227.
- 99 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 1755-1756; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 81-82: *AAS* 85 (1993), 1198-1199.
- 100 *In Iobannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 41, 10: CCL 36, 363; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 13: *AAS* 85 (1993) 1144.
- 117 John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 17: *AAS* 74 (1982), 100.
- 118 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.
- 119 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 39 *AAS* 83 (1991), 842.
- 120 John Paul II, Address to Participants in the Seventh Symposium of European Bishops, on the theme of "Contemporary Attitudes towards Life and Death: a Challenge for Evangelization" (17 October 1989), No. 5 : *Insegnamenti XII*, 2 (1989), 945 Children are resented in the Biblical tradition precisely as God's gift (cf. Ps 127:3) and as a sign of his blessing on those who walk in his ways (cf. Ps 128 3-4).
- 136 John Paul II, Address to Participants in the Study Conference on "The Right to Life in Europe" (18 December 1987): *Insegnamenti X*, 3 (1987), 1446.
- 137 *Message for the 1977 World Day of Peace*: *AAS* 68 (1976), 711-712.



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**A**ll Christians must be aware of their own specific vocation within the political community. It is for them to give an example by their sense of responsibility and their service of the common good. In this way they are to demonstrate concretely how authority can be compatible with freedom, personal initiative with the solidarity of the whole social organism, and the advantages of unity with fruitful diversity. — *Gaudium et Spes, Part 2, Chapter IV, 75*



## Gaudium et Spes

### SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD

*GAUDIUM ET SPES*

DECEMBER 7, 1965

#### **Preface**

1. The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.

#### **Part 1, Chapter I**

12. According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown.

But what is man? About himself he has expressed, and continues to express, many divergent and even contradictory opinions. In these he often exalts himself as the absolute measure of



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all things or debases himself to the point of despair. The result is doubt and anxiety. The Church certainly understands these problems. Endowed with light from God, she can offer solutions to them, so that man's true situation can be portrayed and his defects explained, while at the same time his dignity and destiny are justly acknowledged.

For Sacred Scripture teaches that man was created "to the image of God," is capable of knowing and loving his Creator, and was appointed by him as master of all earthly creatures<sup>1</sup> that he might subdue them and use them to God's glory.<sup>2</sup> "What is man that you should care for him? You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet" (Ps 8:5-7).

But God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning "male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.

Therefore, as we read elsewhere in Holy Scripture God saw "all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen 1:31).

**16.** In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey



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it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged.<sup>9</sup> Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths.<sup>10</sup> In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor.<sup>11</sup> In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships. Hence the more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality. Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for a man who cares but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin.

**17.** Only in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness. Our contemporaries make much of this freedom and pursue it eagerly; and rightly to be sure. Often however they foster it perversely as a license for doing whatever pleases them, even if it is evil. For its part, authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man remain “under the control of his own decisions,”<sup>12</sup> so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to him. Hence man’s dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind



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internal impulse nor by mere external pressure. Man achieves such dignity when, emancipating himself from all captivity to passion, he pursues his goal in a spontaneous choice of what is good, and procures for himself through effective and skilful action, apt helps to that end. Since man's freedom has been damaged by sin, only by the aid of God's grace can he bring such a relationship with God into full flower. Before the judgement seat of God each man must render an account of his own life, whether he has done good or evil.<sup>13</sup>

### Part 1, Chapter II

24. God, who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood. For having been created in the image of God, who "from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26), all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God himself.

For this reason, love for God and neighbor is the first and greatest commandment. Sacred Scripture, however, teaches us that the love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbor: "If there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.... Love therefore is the fulfillment of the Law" (Rom 13:9-10; cf. 1 John 4:20). To men growing daily more dependent on one another, and to a world becoming more unified every day, this truth proves to be of paramount importance.

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when he prayed to the Father, "that all



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may be one. . . as we are one” (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for he implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God’s sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.<sup>2</sup>

**29.** Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God’s likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition.

True, all men are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God’s intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are still not being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right to choose a husband freely, to embrace a state of life or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men.

Therefore, although rightful differences exist between men, the equal dignity of persons demands that a more humane and just condition of life be brought about. For excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family



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or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace.

Human institutions, both private and public, must labor to minister to the dignity and purpose of man. At the same time let them put up a stubborn fight against any kind of slavery, whether social or political, and safeguard the basic rights of man under every political system. Indeed human institutions themselves must be accommodated by degrees to the highest of all realities, spiritual ones, even though meanwhile, a long enough time will be required before they arrive at the desired goal.

### Part 2, Chapter IV

**75.** ...All Christians must be aware of their own specific vocation within the political community. It is for them to give an example by their sense of responsibility and their service of the common good. In this way they are to demonstrate concretely how authority can be compatible with freedom, personal initiative with the solidarity of the whole social organism, and the advantages of unity with fruitful diversity. They must recognize the legitimacy of different opinions with regard to temporal solutions, and respect citizens, who, even as a group, defend their points of view by honest methods. Political parties, for their part, must promote those things, which in their judgment are required for the common good; it is never allowable to give their interests priority over the common good.

Great care must be taken about civic and political formation, which is of the utmost necessity today for the population as a whole,



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and especially for youth, so that all citizens can play their part in the life of the political community. Those who are suited or can become suited should prepare themselves for the difficult, but at the same time, the very noble art of politics,<sup>8</sup> and should seek to practice this art without regard for their own interests or for material advantages. With integrity and wisdom, they must take action against any form of injustice and tyranny, against arbitrary domination by an individual or a political party and any intolerance. They should dedicate themselves to the service of all with sincerity and fairness, indeed, with the charity and fortitude demanded by political life.

### Part 1, Chapter I

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gen. 1:26, Wis. 2:23.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sir. 17:3-10.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Rom. 2:15-16.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Pius XII, radio address on the correct formation of a Christian conscience in the young, March 23, 1952: *AAS* (1952), p. 271.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Matt. 22:37-40; Gal. 5:14.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Sir. 15:14.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 5:10.

### Part 1, Chapter II

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Luke 17:33.

### Part 2, Chapter IV

<sup>8</sup> Pius XI allocution: "Ai dirigenti della Federazione Universitaria Cattolica." *Discorsi di Pio XI* (ed. Bertetto), Turni, vol. 1 (1960) p. 743



## Catholic Civic Responsibility

**E**ach man is also a member of society; hence he belongs to the community of man. It is not just certain individuals but all men who are called to further the development of human society as a whole. —  
*Populorum Progressio*, 17



## Populorum Progressio

POPE PAUL VI ENCYCLICAL  
*POPULORUM PROGRESSIO*  
ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLES  
MARCH 26, 1967

### **Christian vision and development**

14. The development we speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man. As an eminent specialist on this question has rightly said: "We cannot allow economics to be separated from human realities, nor development from the civilization in which it takes place. What counts for us is man — each individual man, each human group, and humanity as a whole."<sup>15</sup>

### **The vocation of self-fulfillment**

15. In God's plan, every man is born to seek self-fulfillment, for every human life is called to some task by God. At birth a human being possesses certain aptitudes and abilities in germinal form, and these qualities are to be cultivated so that they may bear fruit. By developing these traits through formal education or personal effort, the individual works his way toward the goal set for him by the Creator. Endowed with intellect and free will, each man is responsible for his self-fulfillment even as he is for his salvation. He is helped, and sometimes hindered, by his teachers and those around him; yet whatever be the outside influences exerted on him, he is the chief architect of his own success or failure. Utilizing only his talent and will power, each man can grow in



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humanity, enhance his personal worth, and perfect himself.

### **Personal responsibility**

**16.** Self-development, however, is not left up to man's option. Just as the whole of creation is ordered toward its Creator, so too the rational creature should of his own accord direct his life to God, the first truth and the highest good. Thus human self-fulfillment may be said to sum up our obligations.

Moreover, this harmonious integration of our human nature, carried through by personal effort and responsible activity, is destined for a higher state of perfection. United with the life-giving Christ, man's life is newly enhanced; it acquires a transcendent humanism which surpasses its nature and bestows new fullness of life. This is the highest goal of human self-fulfillment.

### **Communal responsibility**

**17.** Each man is also a member of society; hence he belongs to the community of man. It is not just certain individuals but all men who are called to further the development of human society as a whole. Civilizations spring up, flourish and die. As the waves of the sea gradually creep farther and farther in along the shoreline, so the human race inches its way forward through history. We are the heirs of earlier generations, and we reap benefits from the efforts of our contemporaries; we are under obligation to all men. Therefore we cannot disregard the welfare of those who will come after us to increase the human family. The reality of human solidarity brings us not only benefits but also obligations.



## Populorum Progressio

### **The universal purpose for created things**

**22.** In the very first pages of Scripture we read these words: “Fill the earth and subdue it.”<sup>19</sup> This teaches us that the whole of creation is for man, that he has been charged to give it meaning by his intelligent activity, to complete and perfect it by his own efforts and to his own advantage. Now if the earth truly was created to provide man with the necessities of life and the tools for his own progress, it follows that every man has the right to glean what he needs from the earth. The Second Vatican Council reiterated this truth: “God intended the earth and everything in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should flow fairly to all.”<sup>20</sup>

All other rights, whatever they may be, including the rights of property and free trade, are to be subordinated to this principle. They should in no way hinder it; in fact, they should actively facilitate its implementation. Redirecting these rights back to their original purpose must be regarded as an important and urgent social duty.

### **Property**

**23.** “He who has the goods of this world and sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?”<sup>21</sup> Everyone knows that the Fathers of the Church laid down the duty of the rich toward the poor in no uncertain terms. As St. Ambrose put it: “You are not making a gift of what is



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yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.”<sup>22</sup> These words indicate that the right to private property is not absolute and unconditional. No one may appropriate surplus goods solely for his own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life. In short, “as the Fathers of the Church and other eminent theologians tell us, the right of private property may never be exercised to the detriment of the common good.” When “private gain and basic community needs conflict with one another,” it is for the public authorities “to seek a solution to these questions, with the active involvement of individual citizens and social groups.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>15</sup> L. J. Lebreton, O.P., *Dynamique concrète du développement*, Paris: Economie et Humanisme, Les éditions ouvrières (1961), 28.

<sup>19</sup> Gen 1:28.

<sup>20</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 69: AAS 58 (1966), 1090 [cf. TPS XI, 306].

<sup>21</sup> 1 Jn 3:17.

<sup>22</sup> *De Nabute*, c. 12, n. 53: (PL 14. 747); Cf. J. R. Palanque, *Saint Ambroise et l'empire romain*, Paris: de Boccard (1933), 336 ff. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Letter to the 52nd Session of the French Social Weeks, Brest, in *L'homme et la révolution urbaine*, Lyon: Chronique sociale (1965), pp. 8-9. Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 10, 1965 Documentation catholique, t 62, Paris 1965, col. 1365



## Sollicitudo Rei Socialis

**JOHN PAUL II ENCYCLICAL**  
*SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS*  
**ON SOCIAL CONCERN,**  
**December 30, 1987**

39. The exercise of solidarity within each society is valid when its members recognize one another as persons. Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of solidarity, should not adopt a purely passive attitude or one that is destructive of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all. The intermediate groups, in their turn, should not selfishly insist on their particular interests, but respect the interests of others.

Positive signs in the contemporary world are the growing awareness of the solidarity of the poor among themselves, their efforts to support one another, and their public demonstrations on the social scene which, without recourse to violence, present their own needs and rights in the face of the inefficiency or corruption of the public authorities. By virtue of her own evangelical duty the Church feels called to take her stand beside the poor, to discern the justice of their requests, and to help satisfy them, without losing sight of the good of groups in the context of the common good.

The same criterion is applied by analogy in international relationships. Interdependence must be transformed into solidarity,



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based upon the principle that the goods of creation are meant for all. That which human industry produces through the processing of raw materials, with the contribution of work, must serve equally for the good of all.

Surmounting every type of imperialism and determination to preserve their own hegemony, the stronger and richer nations must have a sense of moral responsibility for the other nations, so that a real international system may be established which will rest on the foundation of the equality of all peoples and on the necessary respect for their legitimate differences.

The economically weaker countries, or those still at subsistence level, must be enabled, with the assistance of other peoples and of the international community, to make a contribution of their own to the common good with their treasures of humanity and culture, which otherwise would be lost for ever.

Solidarity helps us to see the “other”— whether a person, people or nation — not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our “neighbor,” a “helper” (cf. Gen 2:18-20), to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God. Hence the importance of reawakening the religious awareness of individuals and peoples.

Thus the exploitation, oppression and annihilation of others are excluded. These facts, in the present division of the world into opposing blocs, combine to produce the danger of war and an excessive preoccupation with personal security, often to the detriment of the autonomy, freedom of decision, and even the



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territorial integrity of the weaker nations situated within the so-called “areas of influence” or “safety belts.” The “structures of sin” and the sins which they produce are like-wise radically opposed to peace and development, for development, in the familiar expression of Pope Paul’s Encyclical, is “the new name for peace.”<sup>68</sup>

In this way, the solidarity which we propose is the path to peace and at the same time to development. For world peace is inconceivable unless the world’s leaders come to recognize that interdependence in itself demands the abandonment of the politics of blocs, the sacrifice of all forms of economic, military or political imperialism, and the transformation of mutual distrust into collaboration. This is precisely the act proper to solidarity among individuals and nations.

The motto of the pontificate of my esteemed predecessor Pius XII was *Opus Iustitiae Pax*, peace as the fruit of justice. Today one could say, with the same exactness and the same power of biblical inspiration (cf. Is 32:17; Jas 3:18): *Opus Solidaritatis Pax*, peace as the fruit of solidarity.

The goal of peace, so desired by everyone, will certainly be achieved through the putting into effect of social and international justice, but also through the practice of the virtues which favor togetherness, and which teach us to live in unity, so as to build in unity, by giving and receiving, a new society and a better world.

<sup>68</sup> Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 87: *loc. cit.*



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