



LEONINE FORUM

SESSION #1—Christian Anthropology: Man in the Modern World
New York City | Oct. 4, 2018 | Fr. Roger Landry

Reading Assignment(s)

Please read the following texts:

(1) Foundational documents of Catholic Social Teaching (CST):

1. *Gaudium et Spes*, §12-39 (p. 3)
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html
2. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, §105-159 (p. 16)
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html
3. *Redemptor Hominis*, §7-17 (p. 31)
http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html
4. *Veritatis Splendor*, §6-27 (p. 46)
http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html
5. *Laborem Exercens*, §4-10, 24-27 (p. 58)
http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html
6. *Fides et Ratio*, §7-35 (p. 71)
http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html
7. *Evangelium Vitae*, §39-47 (p. 84)
http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html
8. Pope Francis, “Audience with Participants in the Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council for Culture” (p. 90)
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/11/18/171118e.html>

(2) Contemporary articles/documents that references where CST principles are *applied*:



1. Peter Kreeft, “Why a Christian Anthropology Makes a Difference” (p. 92)
<https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/the-human-person/why-a-christian-anthropology-makes-a-difference.html>
2. Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, “The Future of Humanity: New Challenges to Anthropology” (p. 104)
http://www.cultura.va/content/dam/cultura/docs/pdf/events/PlenaryTheme2017_en.pdf
3. John Allen, “Where does Catholic thinking on ‘gender theory’ go from here?” (p. 110)
<https://cruxnow.com/news-analysis/2018/03/15/where-does-catholic-thinking-on-gender-theory-go-from-here/>
4. Benjamin Vail, “The Battle Over the Sexes: Catholic Perspectives on the Gender Debate” (p. 112)
<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2015/04/10/the-battle-over-the-sexes-catholic-perspectives-on-the-gender-debate/>

Pre-Session Questions

Please note the following questions as guides to your reading:

- What does it mean that the human person is made in the image and likeness of God?
- What is the purpose of human action? Human work? Human suffering?
- How would you define human freedom? Does it have any relationship to the good? To the true?
- What is the connection between faith and reason in the understanding of the human person?
- What are various “isms” (i.e., relativism) that question Catholic philosophical and theological anthropology (the Catholic understanding of the human person from the philosophical and theological perspectives)?
- What is modern gender theory? How does it compare to Christian anthropology?



Gaudium et Spes, 12-39

THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

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 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 that he might subdue them and use them to God's glory. "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).

13. Although he was made by God in a state of holiness, from the very onset of his history man abused his liberty, at the urging of the Evil One. Man set himself against God and sought to attain his goal apart from God. Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, but their senseless minds were darkened and they served the creature rather than the Creator. What divine revelation makes known to us agrees with experience. Examining his heart, man finds that he has inclinations toward evil too, and is engulfed by manifold ills which cannot come from his good Creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and all created things.

Therefore man is split within himself. As a result, all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Indeed, man finds that by himself he is incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though he is bound by chains. But the Lord Himself came to free and strengthen man, renewing him inwardly and casting out that "prince of this world" (John 12:31) who held him in the bondage of sin. For sin has diminished man, blocking his path to fulfillment.

The call to grandeur and the depths of misery, both of which are a part of human experience, find their ultimate and simultaneous explanation in the light of this revelation.

14. Though made of body and soul, man is one. Through his bodily composition he gathers to himself the elements of the material world; thus they reach their crown through him, and through him raise their voice in free praise of the Creator. For this reason man is not allowed to despise his bodily life, rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and honorable since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day. Nevertheless, wounded by sin, man experiences rebellious stirrings in his



body. But the very dignity of man postulates that man glorify God in his body and forbid it to serve the evil inclinations of his heart.

Now, man is not wrong when he regards himself as superior to bodily concerns, and as more than a speck of nature or a nameless constituent of the city of man. For by his interior qualities he outstrips the whole sum of mere things. He plunges into the depths of reality whenever he enters into his own heart; God, Who probes the heart, awaits him there; there he discerns his proper destiny beneath the eyes of God. Thus, when he recognizes in himself a spiritual and immortal soul, he is not being mocked by a fantasy born only of physical or social influences, but is rather laying hold of the proper truth of the matter.

15. Man judges rightly that by his intellect he surpasses the material universe, for he shares in the light of the divine mind. By relentlessly employing his talents through the ages he has indeed made progress in the practical sciences and in technology and the liberal arts. In our times he has won superlative victories, especially in his probing of the material world and in subjecting it to himself. Still he has always searched for more penetrating truths, and finds them. For his intelligence is not confined to observable data alone, but can with genuine certitude attain to reality itself as knowable, though in consequence of sin that certitude is partly obscured and weakened.

The intellectual nature of the human person is perfected by wisdom and needs to be, for wisdom gently attracts the mind of man to a quest and a love for what is true and good. Steeped in wisdom, man passes through visible realities to those which are unseen.

Our era needs such wisdom more than bygone ages if the discoveries made by man are to be further humanized. For the future of the world stands in peril unless wiser men are forthcoming. It should also be pointed out that many nations, poorer in economic goods, are quite rich in wisdom and can offer noteworthy advantages to others.

It is, finally, through the gift of the Holy Spirit that man comes by faith to the contemplation and appreciation of the divine plan.

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 it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor. 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," 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 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 skillful 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 judgment seat of God each man must render an account of his own life, whether he has done good or evil.

18. It is in the face of death that the riddle a human existence grows most acute. Not only is man tormented by pain and by the advancing deterioration of his body, but even more so by a dread of perpetual extinction. He rightly follows the intuition of his heart when he abhors and repudiates the utter ruin and total disappearance of his own person. He rebels against death because he bears in himself an eternal seed which cannot be reduced to sheer matter. All the endeavors of technology, though useful in the extreme, cannot calm his anxiety; for prolongation of biological life is unable to satisfy that desire for higher life which is inescapably lodged in his breast.

Although the mystery of death utterly beggars the imagination, the Church has been taught by divine revelation and firmly teaches that man has been created by God for a blissful purpose beyond the reach of earthly misery. In addition, that bodily death from which man would have been immune had he not sinned will be vanquished, according to the Christian faith, when man who was ruined by his own doing is restored to wholeness by an almighty and merciful Savior. For God has called man and still calls him so that with his entire being he might be joined to Him in an endless sharing of a divine life beyond all corruption. Christ won this victory when He rose to life, for by His death He freed man from death. Hence to every thoughtful man a solidly established faith provides the answer to his anxiety about what the future holds for him. At the same time faith gives him the power to be united in Christ with his loved ones who have already been snatched away by death; faith arouses the hope that they have found true life with God.

19. The root reason for human dignity lies in man's call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin man is already invited to converse with God. For man would not exist were he not created by God's love and constantly preserved by it; and he cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to His Creator. Still, many of our contemporaries have never recognized this intimate and vital link with God, or have explicitly rejected it. Thus atheism must be accounted among the most serious problems of this age, and is deserving of closer examination.

The word atheism is applied to phenomena which are quite distinct from one another. For while God is expressly denied by some, others believe that man can assert absolutely nothing about Him. Still others use such a method to scrutinize the question of God as to make it seem devoid of meaning. Many, unduly transgressing the limits of the positive sciences, contend that everything can be explained by this kind of scientific reasoning alone, or by contrast, they altogether disallow that there is any absolute truth. Some laud man so extravagantly that their faith in God lapses into a kind of anemia, though they seem more inclined to affirm man than to deny God. Again some form for themselves such a fallacious idea of God that when they repudiate this figment they are by no means rejecting the God of the Gospel. Some never get to the point of raising questions about God, since they seem to experience no religious stirrings nor do they see why they should trouble themselves about



religion. Moreover, atheism results not rarely from a violent protest against the evil in this world, or from the absolute character with which certain human values are unduly invested, and which thereby already accords them the stature of God. Modern civilization itself often complicates the approach to God not for any essential reason but because it is so heavily engrossed in earthly affairs.

Undeniably, those who willfully shut out God from their hearts and try to dodge religious questions are not following the dictates of their consciences, and hence are not free of blame; yet believers themselves frequently bear some responsibility for this situation. For, taken as a whole, atheism is not a spontaneous development but stems from a variety of causes, including a critical reaction against religious beliefs, and in some places against the Christian religion in particular. Hence believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion.

20. Modern atheism often takes on a systematic expression which, in addition to other causes, stretches the desires for human independence to such a point that it poses difficulties against any kind of dependence on God. Those who profess atheism of this sort maintain that it gives man freedom to be an end unto himself, the sole artisan and creator of his own history. They claim that this freedom cannot be reconciled with the affirmation of a Lord Who is author and purpose of all things, or at least that this freedom makes such an affirmation altogether superfluous. Favoring this doctrine can be the sense of power which modern technical progress generates in man.

Not to be overlooked among the forms of modern atheism is that which anticipates the liberation of man especially through his economic and social emancipation. This form argues that by its nature religion thwarts this liberation by arousing man's hope for a deceptive future life, thereby diverting him from the constructing of the earthly city. Consequently when the proponents of this doctrine gain governmental power they vigorously fight against religion, and promote atheism by using, especially in the education of youth, those means of pressure which public power has at its disposal.

21. In her loyal devotion to God and men, the Church has already repudiated and cannot cease repudiating, sorrowfully but as firmly as possible, those poisonous doctrines and actions which contradict reason and the common experience of humanity, and dethrone man from his native excellence.

Still, she strives to detect in the atheistic mind the hidden causes for the denial of God; conscious of how weighty are the questions which atheism raises, and motivated by love for all men, she believes these questions ought to be examined seriously and more profoundly.

The Church holds that the recognition of God is in no way hostile to man's dignity, since this dignity is rooted and perfected in God. For man was made an intelligent and free member of society by God Who created him, but even more important, he is called as a son to commune with God and share in His happiness. She further teaches that a hope related to the end of time does not diminish the importance of intervening duties but rather undergirds the acquittal of them with fresh incentives. By contrast, when a divine instruction and the hope of life eternal are wanting, man's dignity is most grievously lacerated, as current events often attest; riddles of life and death, of guilt and of grief go unsolved with the frequent result that men succumb to despair.

Meanwhile every man remains to himself an unsolved puzzle, however obscurely he may perceive it. For on certain occasions no one can entirely escape the kind of self-questioning mentioned earlier,



especially when life's major events take place. To this questioning only God fully and most certainly provides an answer as He summons man to higher knowledge and humbler probing.

The remedy which must be applied to atheism, however, is to be sought in a proper presentation of the Church's teaching as well as in the integral life of the Church and her members. For it is the function of the Church, led by the Holy Spirit Who renews and purifies her ceaselessly, to make God the Father and His Incarnate Son present and in a sense visible. This result is achieved chiefly by the witness of a living and mature faith, namely, one trained to see difficulties clearly and to master them. Many martyrs have given luminous witness to this faith and continue to do so. This faith needs to prove its fruitfulness by penetrating the believer's entire life, including its worldly dimensions, and by activating him toward justice and love, especially regarding the needy. What does the most reveal God's presence, however, is the brotherly charity of the faithful who are united in spirit as they work together for the faith of the Gospel and who prove themselves a sign of unity.

While rejecting atheism, root and branch, the Church sincerely professes that all men, believers and unbelievers alike, ought to work for the rightful betterment of this world in which all alike live; such an ideal cannot be realized, however, apart from sincere and prudent dialogue. Hence the Church protests against the distinction which some state authorities make between believers and unbelievers, with prejudice to the fundamental rights of the human person. The Church calls for the active liberty of believers to build up in this world God's temple too. She courteously invites atheists to examine the Gospel of Christ with an open mind.

Above all the Church knows that her message is in harmony with the most secret desires of the human heart when she champions the dignity of the human vocation, restoring hope to those who have already despaired of anything higher than their present lot. Far from diminishing man, her message brings to his development light, life and freedom. Apart from this message nothing will avail to fill up the heart of man: "Thou hast made us for Thyself," O Lord, "and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."

22. The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.

He Who is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam He restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as He assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.

As an innocent lamb He merited for us life by the free shedding of His own blood. In Him God reconciled us to Himself and among ourselves; from bondage to the devil and sin He delivered us, so that each one of us can say with the Apostle: The Son of God "loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). By suffering for us He not only provided us with an example for our imitation, He blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning.



The Christian man, conformed to the likeness of that Son Who is the firstborn of many brothers, received "the first-fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23) by which he becomes capable of discharging the new law of love. Through this Spirit, who is "the pledge of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14), the whole man is renewed from within, even to the achievement of "the redemption of the body" (Rom. 8:23): "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the death dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11).(29) Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.

Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by His death; He has lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit; Abba, Father.

THE COMMUNITY OF MANKIND

23. One of the salient features of the modern world is the growing interdependence of men one on the other, a development promoted chiefly by modern technical advances. Nevertheless brotherly dialogue among men does not reach its perfection on the level of technical progress, but on the deeper level of interpersonal relationships. These demand a mutual respect for the full spiritual dignity of the person. Christian revelation contributes greatly to the promotion of this communion between persons, and at the same time leads us to a deeper understanding of the laws of social life which the Creator has written into man's moral and spiritual nature.

Since rather recent documents of the Church's teaching authority have dealt at considerable length with Christian doctrine about human society, this council is merely going to call to mind some of the more basic truths, treating their foundations under the light of revelation. Then it will dwell more at length on certain of their implications having special significance for our day.

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 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.

25. Man's social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on one another. For the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person which for its part and by its very nature stands completely in need of social life. Since this social life is not something added on to man, through his dealings with others, through reciprocal duties, and through fraternal dialogue he develops all his gifts and is able to rise to his destiny.

Among those social ties which man needs for his development some, like the family and political community, relate with greater immediacy to his innermost nature; others originate rather from his free decision. In our era, for various reasons, reciprocal ties and mutual dependencies increase day by day and give rise to a variety of associations and organizations, both public and private. This development, which is called socialization, while certainly not without its dangers, brings with it many advantages with respect to consolidating and increasing the qualities of the human person, and safeguarding his rights.

But if by this social life the human person is greatly aided in responding to his destiny, even in its religious dimensions, it cannot be denied that men are often diverted from doing good and spurred toward and by the social circumstances in which they live and are immersed from their birth. To be sure the disturbances which so frequently occur in the social order result in part from the natural tensions of economic, political and social forms. But at a deeper level they flow from man's pride and selfishness, which contaminate even the social sphere. When the structure of affairs is flawed by the consequences of sin, man, already born with a bent toward evil, finds there new inducements to sin, which cannot be overcome without strenuous efforts and the assistance of grace.

26. Every day human interdependence grows more tightly drawn and spreads by degrees over the whole world. As a result the common good, that is, the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment, today takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family.

At the same time, however, there is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person, since he stands above all things, and his rights and duties are universal and inviolable. Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one's own conscience, to protection of privacy and rightful freedom even in matters religious.

Hence, the social order and its development must invariably work to the benefit of the human person if the disposition of affairs is to be subordinate to the personal realm and not contrariwise, as the Lord indicated when He said that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

This social order requires constant improvement. It must be founded on truth, built on justice and animated by love; in freedom it should grow every day toward a more humane balance. An



improvement in attitudes and abundant changes in society will have to take place if these objectives are to be gained.

God's Spirit, Who with a marvelous providence directs the unfolding of time and renews the face of the earth, is not absent from this development. The ferment of the Gospel too has aroused and continues to arouse in man's heart the irresistible requirements of his dignity.

27. Coming down to practical and particularly urgent consequences, this council lays stress on reverence for man; everyone must consider his every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all His life and the means necessary to living it with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus.

In our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of every person without exception and of actively helping him when he comes across our path, whether he be an old person abandoned by all, a foreign laborer unjustly looked down upon, a refugee, a child born of an unlawful union and wrongly suffering for a sin he did not commit, or a hungry person who disturbs our conscience by recalling the voice of the Lord, "As long as you did it for one of these the least of my brethren, you did it for me" (Matt. 25:40).

Furthermore, whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are supreme dishonor to the Creator.

28. Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through such courtesy and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them.

This love and good will, to be sure, must in no way render us indifferent to truth and goodness. Indeed love itself impels the disciples of Christ to speak the saving truth to all men. But it is necessary to distinguish between error, which always merits repudiation, and the person in error, who never loses the dignity of being a person even when he is flawed by false or inadequate religious notions. God alone is the judge and searcher of hearts, for that reason He forbids us to make judgments about the internal guilt of anyone.

The teaching of Christ even requires that we forgive injuries, and extends the law of love to include every enemy, according to the command of the New Law: "You have heard that it was said: Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thy enemy. But I say to you: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you" (Matt. 5:43-44).

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 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.

30. Profound and rapid changes make it more necessary that no one ignoring the trend of events or drugged by laziness, content himself with a merely individualistic morality. It grows increasingly true that the obligations of justice and love are fulfilled only if each person, contributing to the common good, according to his own abilities and the needs of others, also promotes and assists the public and private institutions dedicated to bettering the conditions of human life. Yet there are those who, while possessing grand and rather noble sentiments, nevertheless in reality live always as if they cared nothing for the needs of society. Many in various places even make light of social laws and precepts, and do not hesitate to resort to various frauds and deceptions in avoiding just taxes or other debts due to society. Others think little of certain norms of social life, for example those designed for the protection of health, or laws establishing speed limits; they do not even avert to the fact that by such indifference they imperil their own life and that of others.

Let everyone consider it his sacred obligation to esteem and observe social necessities as belonging to the primary duties of modern man. For the more unified the world becomes, the more plainly do the offices of men extend beyond particular groups and spread by degrees to the whole world. But this development cannot occur unless individual men and their associations cultivate in themselves the moral and social virtues, and promote them in society; thus, with the needed help of divine grace men who are truly new and artisans of a new humanity can be forthcoming.

31. In order for individual men to discharge with greater exactness the obligations of their conscience toward themselves and the various group to which they belong, they must be carefully educated to a higher degree of culture through the use of the immense resources available today to the human race. Above all the education of youth from every social background has to be undertaken, so that there can be produced not only men and women of refined talents, but those great-souled persons who are so desperately required by our times.

Now a man can scarcely arrive at the needed sense of responsibility, unless his living conditions allow him to become conscious of his dignity, and to rise to his destiny by spending himself for God and for others. But human freedom is often crippled when a man encounters extreme poverty just as it withers when he indulges in too many of life's comforts and imprisons himself in a kind of splendid isolation. Freedom acquires new strength, by contrast, when a man consents to the unavoidable



requirements of social life, takes on the manifold demands of human partnership, and commits himself to the service of the human community.

Hence, the will to play one's role in common endeavors should be everywhere encouraged. Praise is due to those national procedures which allow the largest possible number of citizens to participate in public affairs with genuine freedom. Account must be taken, to be sure, of the actual conditions of each people and the decisiveness required by public authority. If every citizen is to feel inclined to take part in the activities of the various groups which make up the social body, these must offer advantages which will attract members and dispose them to serve others. We can justly consider that the future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping.

32. As God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity, so also "it has pleased God to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals, without bond or link between them, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness." So from the beginning of salvation history He has chosen men not just as individuals but as members of a certain community. Revealing His mind to them, God called these chosen ones "His people" (Ex. 3:7-12), and even made a covenant with them on Sinai.

This communitarian character is developed and consummated in the work of Jesus Christ. For the very Word made flesh willed to share in the human fellowship. He was present at the wedding of Cana, visited the house of Zacchaeus, ate with publicans and sinners. He revealed the love of the Father and the sublime vocation of man in terms of the most common of social realities and by making use of the speech and the imagery of plain everyday life. Willingly obeying the laws of his country He sanctified those human ties, especially family ones, which are the source of social structures. He chose to lead the life proper to an artisan of His time and place.

In His preaching He clearly taught the sons of God to treat one another as brothers. In His prayers He pleaded that all His disciples might be "one." Indeed as the redeemer of all, He offered Himself for all even to point of death. "Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). He commanded His Apostles to preach to all peoples the Gospel's message that the human race was to become the Family of God, in which the fullness of the Law would be love.

As the firstborn of many brethren and by the giving of His Spirit, He founded after His death and resurrection a new brotherly community composed of all those who receive Him in faith and in love. This He did through His Body, which is the Church. There everyone, as members one of the other, would render mutual service according to the different gifts bestowed on each.

This solidarity must be constantly increased until that day on which it will be brought to perfection. Then, saved by grace, men will offer flawless glory to God as a family beloved of God and of Christ their Brother.

MAN'S ACTIVITY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

33. Through his labors and his native endowments man has ceaselessly striven to better his life. Today, however, especially with the help of science and technology, he has extended his mastery over nearly the whole of nature and continues to do so. Thanks to increased opportunities for many kinds of social contact among nations, the human family is gradually recognizing that it comprises a single world community and is making itself so. Hence many benefits once looked for, especially from heavenly powers, man has now enterprisingly procured for himself.



In the face of these immense efforts which already preoccupy the whole human race, men agitate numerous questions among themselves. What is the meaning and value of this feverish activity? How should all these things be used? To the achievement of what goal are the strivings of individuals and societies heading? The Church guards the heritage of God's word and draws from it moral and religious principles without always having at hand the solution to particular problems. As such she desires to add the light of revealed truth to mankind's store of experience, so that the path which humanity has taken in recent times will not be a dark one.

34. Throughout the course of the centuries, men have labored to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort. To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, this human activity accords with God's will. For man, created to God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to Him Who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. Thus, by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth.

This mandate concerns the whole of everyday activity as well. For while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women are performing their activities in a way which appropriately benefits society. They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brother men, and are contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan.

Thus, far from thinking that works produced by man's own talent and energy are in opposition to God's power, and that the rational creature exists as a kind of rival to the Creator, Christians are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's grace and the flowering of His own mysterious design. For the greater man's power becomes, the farther his individual and community responsibility extends. Hence it is clear that men are not deterred by the Christian message from building up the world, or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows, but that they are rather more stringently bound to do these very things.

35. Human activity, to be sure, takes its significance from its relationship to man. Just as it proceeds from man, so it is ordered toward man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has. Similarly, all that men do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, a more humane disposition of social relationships has greater worth than technical advances. For these advances can supply the material for human progress, but of themselves alone they can never actually bring it about.

Hence, the norm of human activity is this: that in accord with the divine plan and will, it harmonize with the genuine good of the human race, and that it allow men as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfill it.

36. Now many of our contemporaries seem to fear that a closer bond between human activity and religion will work against the independence of men, of societies, or of the sciences.

If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created,



all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts. Therefore if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God. Indeed whoever labors to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind, even though he is unaware of the fact, is nevertheless being led by the hand of God, who holds all things in existence, and gives them their identity. Consequently, we cannot but deplore certain habits of mind, which are sometimes found too among Christians, which do not sufficiently attend to the rightful independence of science and which, from the arguments and controversies they spark, lead many minds to conclude that faith and science are mutually opposed.

But if the expression, the independence of temporal affairs, is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is. For without the Creator the creature would disappear. For their part, however, all believers of whatever religion always hear His revealing voice in the discourse of creatures. When God is forgotten, however, the creature itself grows unintelligible.

37. Sacred Scripture teaches the human family what the experience of the ages confirms: that while human progress is a great advantage to man, it brings with it a strong temptation. For when the order of values is jumbled and bad is mixed with the good, individuals and groups pay heed solely to their own interests, and not to those of others. Thus it happens that the world ceases to be a place of true brotherhood. In our own day, the magnified power of humanity threatens to destroy the race itself.

For a monumental struggle against the powers of darkness pervades the whole history of man. The battle was joined from the very origins of the world and will continue until the last day, as the Lord has attested. Caught in this conflict, man is obliged to wrestle constantly if he is to cling to what is good, nor can he achieve his own integrity without great efforts and the help of God's grace.

That is why Christ's Church, trusting in the design of the Creator, acknowledges that human progress can serve man's true happiness, yet she cannot help echoing the Apostle's warning: "Be not conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2). Here by the world is meant that spirit of vanity and malice which transforms into an instrument of sin those human energies intended for the service of God and man.

Hence if anyone wants to know how this unhappy situation can be overcome, Christians will tell him that all human activity, constantly imperiled by man's pride and deranged self-love, must be purified and perfected by the power of Christ's cross and resurrection. For redeemed by Christ and made a new creature in the Holy Spirit, man is able to love the things themselves created by God, and ought to do so. He can receive them from God and respect and reverence them as flowing constantly from the hand of God. Grateful to his Benefactor for these creatures, using and enjoying them in detachment and liberty of spirit, man is led forward into a true possession of them, as having nothing, yet possessing all things. "All are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:22-23).

38. For God's Word, through Whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh and dwelt on the earth of men. Thus He entered the world's history as a perfect man, taking that history up into Himself and summarizing it. He Himself revealed to us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and at the



same time taught us that the new command of love was the basic law of human perfection and hence of the world's transformation.

To those, therefore, who believe in divine love, He gives assurance that the way of love lies open to men and that the effort to establish a universal brotherhood is not a hopeless one. He cautions them at the same time that this charity is not something to be reserved for important matters, but must be pursued chiefly in the ordinary circumstances of life. Undergoing death itself for all of us sinners, He taught us by example that we too must shoulder that cross which the world and the flesh inflict upon those who search after peace and justice. Appointed Lord by His resurrection and given plenary power in heaven and on earth, Christ is now at work in the hearts of men through the energy of His Holy Spirit, arousing not only a desire for the age to come, but by that very fact animating, purifying and strengthening those noble longings too by which the human family makes its life more human and strives to render the whole earth submissive to this goal.

Now, the gifts of the Spirit are diverse: while He calls some to give clear witness to the desire for a heavenly home and to keep that desire green among the human family, He summons others to dedicate themselves to the earthly service of men and to make ready the material of the celestial realm by this ministry of theirs. Yet He frees all of them so that by putting aside love of self and bringing all earthly resources into the service of human life they can devote themselves to that future when humanity itself will become an offering accepted by God.

The Lord left behind a pledge of this hope and strength for life's journey in that sacrament of faith where natural elements refined by man are gloriously changed into His Body and Blood, providing a meal of brotherly solidarity and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

39. We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity, nor do we know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away; but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart. Then, with death overcome, the sons of God will be raised up in Christ, and what was sown in weakness and corruption will be invested with incorruptibility. Enduring with charity and its fruits, all that creation which God made on man's account will be unchained from the bondage of vanity.

Therefore, while we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gain the whole world and lose himself, the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age.

Hence, while earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God.

For after we have obeyed the Lord, and in His Spirit nurtured on earth the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and enterprise, we will find them again, but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured, when Christ hands over to the Father: "a kingdom eternal and universal, a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace." On this earth that Kingdom is already present in mystery. When the Lord returns it will be brought into full flower.



Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 105-159

THE HUMAN PERSON AND HUMAN RIGHTS

I. SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND THE PERSONALIST PRINCIPLE

105. *The Church sees in men and women, in every person, the living image of God himself. This image finds, and must always find anew, an ever deeper and fuller unfolding of itself in the mystery of Christ, the Perfect Image of God, the One who reveals God to man and man to himself.* It is to these men and women, who have received an incomparable and inalienable dignity from God himself, that the Church speaks, rendering to them the highest and most singular service, constantly reminding them of their lofty vocation so that they may always be mindful of it and worthy of it. Christ, the Son of God, “by his incarnation has united himself in some fashion with every person”; for this reason the Church recognizes as her fundamental duty the task of seeing that this union is continuously brought about and renewed. In Christ the Lord, the Church indicates and strives to be the first to embark upon the path of the human person, and she invites all people to recognize in everyone — near and far, known and unknown, and above all in the poor and the suffering — a brother or sister “for whom Christ died” (1 Cor 8:11; Rom 14:15).

106. *All of social life is an expression of its unmistakable protagonist: the human person.* The Church has many times and in many ways been the authoritative advocate of this understanding, recognizing and affirming the centrality of the human person in every sector and expression of society: “Human society is therefore the object of the social teaching of the Church since she is neither outside nor over and above socially united men, but exists exclusively in them and, therefore, for them.” This important awareness is expressed in the affirmation that “far from being the object or passive element of social life” the human person “is rather, and must always remain, its subject, foundation and goal.” The origin of social life is therefore found in the human person, and society cannot refuse to recognize its active and responsible subject; every expression of society must be directed towards the human person.

107. *Men and women, in the concrete circumstances of history, represent the heart and soul of Catholic social thought. The whole of the Church's social doctrine, in fact, develops from the principle that affirms the inviolable dignity of the human person.* In her manifold expressions of this knowledge, the Church has striven above all to defend human dignity in the face of every attempt to re-dimension or distort its image; moreover she has often denounced the many violations of human dignity. History attests that it is from the fabric of social relationships that there arise some of the best possibilities for ennobling the human person, but it is also there that lie in wait the most loathsome rejections of human dignity.

II. THE HUMAN PERSON AS THE “IMAGO DEI”

a. Creatures in the image of God

108. *The fundamental message of Sacred Scripture proclaims that the human person is a creature of God (cf. Ps 139:14-18), and sees in his being in the image of God the element that characterizes and distinguishes him:* “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). God places the human creature at the center and summit of the created order. Man (in Hebrew, “*adam*”) is formed from the earth (“*adamah*”) and God blows into his nostrils the breath of life (cf. Gen 2:7). Therefore, “being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-



knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. Further, he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.”

109. *The likeness with God shows that the essence and existence of man are constitutively related to God in the most profound manner.* This is a relationship that exists in itself, it is therefore not something that comes afterwards and is not added from the outside. The whole of man's life is a quest and a search for God. This relationship with God can be ignored or even forgotten or dismissed, but it can never be eliminated. Indeed, among all the world's visible creatures, only man has a “capacity for God” (*“homo est Dei capax”*). The human being is a personal being created by God to be in relationship with him; man finds life and self-expression only in relationship, and tends naturally to God.

110. *The relationship between God and man is reflected in the relational and social dimension of human nature.* Man, in fact, is not a solitary being, but “a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.” In this regard the fact that God created *human beings as man and woman* (cf. *Gen 1:27*) is significant: “How very significant is the dissatisfaction which marks man's life in Eden as long as his sole point of reference is the world of plants and animals (cf. *Gen 2:20*). Only the appearance of the woman, a being who is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones (cf. *Gen 2:23*), and in whom the spirit of God the Creator is also alive, can satisfy the need for interpersonal dialogue, so vital for human existence. In one's neighbor, whether man or woman, there is a reflection of God himself, the definitive goal and fulfillment of every person.”

111. *Man and woman have the same dignity and are of equal value, not only because they are both, in their differences, created in the image of God, but even more profoundly because the dynamic of reciprocity that gives life to the “we” in the human couple, is an image of God.* In a relationship of mutual communion, man and woman fulfill themselves in a profound way, rediscovering themselves as persons through the sincere gift of themselves. Their covenant of union is presented in Sacred Scripture as an image of the Covenant of God with man (cf. *Hos 1-3; Is 54; Eph 5:21-33*) and, at the same time, as a service to life. Indeed, the human couple can participate in God's act of creation: “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it’ “ (*Gen 1:28*).

112. *Man and woman are in relationship with others above all as those to whom the lives of others have been entrusted.* “For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning, ... I will require it ... of man [and] of every man's brother” (*Gen 9:5*), God tells Noah after the flood. In this perspective, the relationship with God requires that *the life of man be considered sacred and inviolable*. The fifth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (*Ex20:13; Deut 5:17*), has validity because God alone is Lord of life and death. The respect owed to the inviolability and integrity of physical life finds its climax in the positive commandment: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (*Lev 19:18*), by which Jesus enjoys the obligation to tend to the needs of one's neighbor (cf. *Mt 22:37-40; Mk 12:29-31; Lk 10:27-28*).

113. *With this specific vocation to life, man and woman find themselves also in the presence of all the other creatures. They can and are obliged to put them at their own service and to enjoy them, but their dominion over the world requires the exercise of responsibility, it is not a freedom of arbitrary and selfish exploitation.* All of creation in fact has value and is “good” (cf. *Gen 1:4,10,12,18,21,25*) in the sight of God, who is its author. Man must discover and respect its value. This is a marvelous challenge to his intellect, which should lift him up as on wings [towards the contemplation of the truth of all God's creatures, that is, the contemplation of what God sees as *good* in them. The Book of Genesis teaches that human dominion over the world consists in *naming things* (cf. *Gen 2:19-20*). In giving things



their names, man must recognize them for what they are and establish with each of them a relationship of responsibility.

114. *Man is also in relationship with himself and is able to reflect on himself.* Sacred Scripture speaks in this regard about the *heart of man*. The heart designates man's inner spirituality, what distinguishes him from every other creature. God “has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end” (*Eccles 3:11*). In the end, the heart indicates the spiritual faculties which most properly belong to man, which are his prerogatives insofar as he is created in the image of his Creator: reason, the discernment of good and evil, free will. When he listens to the deep aspirations of his heart, no person can fail to make his own the words of truth expressed by Saint Augustine: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

b. The tragedy of sin

115. *This marvelous vision of man's creation by God is inseparable from the tragic appearance of original sin.* With a clear affirmation the Apostle Paul sums up the account of man's fall contained in the first pages of the Bible: “Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin” (*Rom 5:12*). Man, against God's prohibition, allows himself to be seduced by the serpent and stretches out his hand to the tree of life, falling prey to death. By this gesture, man tries to break through his limits as a creature, challenging God, his sole Lord and the source of his life. It is a sin of disobedience (cf. *Rom 5:19*) that separates man from God.

From revelation we know that Adam, the first man, transgresses God's commandment and loses the holiness and justice in which he was made, holiness and justice which were received not only for himself but for all of humanity: “By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a *personal sin*, but this sin affected *the human nature* that they would then transmit *in a fallen state*. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice.”

116. *At the root of personal and social divisions, which in differing degrees offend the value and dignity of the human person, there is a wound which is present in man's inmost self.* “In the light of faith we call it sin: beginning with original sin, which all of us bear from birth as an inheritance from our first parents, to the sin which each one of us commits when we abuse our own freedom.” The consequences of sin, insofar as it is an act of separation from God, are alienation, that is, the separation of man not only from God but also from himself, from other men and from the world around him. “Man's rupture with God leads tragically to divisions between brothers. In the description of the ‘first sin’, the rupture with Yahweh simultaneously breaks the bond of friendship that had united the human family. Thus the subsequent pages of *Genesis* show us the man and the woman as it were pointing an accusing finger at each other (cf. *Gen. 3:12*). Later we have brother hating brother and finally taking his brother's life (cf. *Gen 4:2-16*). According to the Babel story, the result of sin is the shattering of the human family, already begun with the first sin and now reaching its most extreme form on the social level.” Reflecting on the mystery of sin, we cannot fail to take into consideration this tragic connection between cause and effect.

117. The mystery of sin is composed of a twofold wound, which the sinner opens in his own side and in the relationship with his neighbor. That is why we can speak of personal and social sin. Every sin is personal under a certain aspect; under another, every sin is social, insofar as and because it also



has social consequences. In its true sense, sin is always an act of the person, because it is the free act of an individual person and not properly speaking of a group or community. The character of social sin can unquestionably be ascribed to every sin, taking into account the fact that “by virtue of human solidarity which is as mysterious and intangible as it is real and concrete, each individual’s sin in some way affects others.” It is not, however, legitimate or acceptable to understand social sin in a way that, more or less consciously, leads to a weakening or the virtual cancellation of the personal component by admitting only social guilt and responsibility. At the bottom of every situation of sin there is always the individual who sins.

118. *Certain sins, moreover, constitute by their very object a direct assault on one’s neighbor. Such sins in particular are known as social sins.* Social sin is every sin committed against the justice due in relations between individuals, between the individual and the community, and also between the community and the individual. Social too is every sin against the rights of the human person, starting with the right to life, including that of life in the womb, and every sin against the physical integrity of the individual; every sin against the freedom of others, especially against the supreme freedom to believe in God and worship him; and every sin against the dignity and honor of one’s neighbor. Every sin against the common good and its demands, in the whole broad area of rights and duties of citizens, is also social sin. In the end, social sin is that sin that “refers to the relationships between the various human communities. These relationships are not always in accordance with the plan of God, who intends that there be justice in the world and freedom and peace between individuals, groups and peoples.”

119. *The consequences of sin perpetuate the structures of sin. These are rooted in personal sin and, therefore, are always connected to concrete acts of the individuals who commit them, consolidate them and make it difficult to remove them.* It is thus that they grow stronger, spread and become sources of other sins, conditioning human conduct. These are obstacles and conditioning that go well beyond the actions and brief life span of the individual and interfere also in the process of the development of peoples, the delay and slow pace of which must be judged in this light. The actions and attitudes opposed to the will of God and the good of neighbor, as well as the structures arising from such behavior, appear to fall into two categories today: “on the one hand, the all-consuming desire for profit, and on the other, the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one’s will upon others. In order to characterize better each of these attitudes, one can add the expression: ‘at any price.’”

c. The universality of sin and the universality of salvation

120. *The doctrine of original sin, which teaches the universality of sin, has an important foundation: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn1:8).* This doctrine encourages men and women not to remain in guilt and not to take guilt lightly, continuously seeking scapegoats in other people and justification in the environment, in heredity, in institutions, in structures and in relationships. This is a teaching that unmasks such deceptions.

The doctrine of the universality of sin, however, must not be separated from the consciousness of the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ. If it is so separated it engenders a false anxiety of sin and a pessimistic view of the world and life, which leads to contempt of the cultural and civil accomplishments of mankind.

121. *Christian realism sees the abysses of sin, but in the light of the hope, greater than any evil, given by Jesus Christ’s act of redemption, in which sin and death are destroyed (cf. Rom5:18-21; 1 Cor 15:56-*



57): “In him God reconciled man to himself.” It is Christ, the image of God (cf. *2 Cor* 4:4; *Col* 1:15), who enlightens fully and brings to completion the image and likeness of God in man. The Word that became man in Jesus Christ has always been mankind's life and light, the light that enlightens every person (cf. *Jn* 1:4,9). God desires in the one mediator Jesus Christ, his Son, the salvation of all men and women (cf. *1 Tim* 2:4-5). Jesus is at the same time the Son of God and the new Adam, that is, the new man (cf. *1 Cor* 15:47-49; *Rom* 5:14): “Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling.” In him we are, by God, “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren” (*Rom* 8:29).

122. The new reality that Jesus Christ gives us is not grafted onto human nature nor is it added from outside: it is rather that reality of communion with the Trinitarian God to which men and women have always been oriented in the depths of their being, thanks to their creaturely likeness to God. But this is also a reality that people cannot attain by their own forces alone. Through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, in whom this reality of communion has already been brought about in a singular manner, men and women are received as children of God (cf. *Rom* 8:14-17; *Gal* 4:4-7). By means of Christ, we share in the nature of God, who gives us infinitely more “than all that we ask or think” (*Eph* 3:20). What mankind has already received is nothing more than a token or a “guarantee” (*2 Cor* 1:22; *Eph* 1:14) of what it will receive in its fullness only in the presence of God, seen “face to face” (*1 Cor* 13:12), that is, a guarantee of eternal life: “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (*Jn* 17:3).

123. *The universality of this hope also includes, besides the men and women of all peoples, heaven and earth:* “Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth, and let it cause righteousness to spring up also; I the Lord have created it” (*Is* 45:8). According to the New Testament, all creation, together indeed with all humanity, awaits the Redeemer: subjected to futility, creation reaches out full of hope, with groans and birth pangs, longing to be freed from decay (cf. *Rom* 8:18-22).

III. THE MANY ASPECTS OF THE HUMAN PERSON

124. *Prizing highly the marvelous biblical message, the Church's social doctrine stops to dwell above all on the principal and indispensable dimensions of the human person. Thus it is able to grasp the most significant facets of the mystery and dignity of human beings.* In the past there has been no lack of various reductionist conceptions of the human person, many of which are still dramatically present on the stage of modern history. These are ideological in character or are simply the result of widespread forms of custom or thought concerning mankind, human life and human destiny. The common denominator among these is the attempt to make the image of man unclear by emphasizing only one of his characteristics at the expense of all the others.”

125. The human person may never be thought of only as an absolute individual being, built up by himself and on himself, as if his characteristic traits depended on no one else but himself. Nor can the person be thought of as a mere cell of an organism that is inclined at most to grant it recognition in its functional role within the overall system. Reductionist conceptions of the full truth of men and women have already been the object of the Church's social concern many times, and she has not failed to raise her voice against these, as against other drastically reductive perspectives, taking care to proclaim instead that “individuals do not feel themselves isolated units, like grains of sand, but united



by the very force of their nature and by their internal destiny, into an organic, harmonious mutual relationship.” She has affirmed instead that man cannot be understood “simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism,” and is therefore attentive that the affirmation of the primacy of the person is not seen as corresponding to an individualistic or mass vision.

126. *Christian faith, while inviting that whatever is good and worthy of man should be sought out wherever it may be found (cf. 1 Thes 5:21), “is above and is sometimes opposed to the ideologies, in that it recognizes God, who is transcendent and the Creator, and who, through all the levels of creation, calls on man as endowed with responsibility and freedom.”*

The Church's social doctrine strives to indicate the different dimensions of the mystery of man, who must be approached “in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and also of his community and social being, with special attention so that the value of the human person may be readily perceived.

A. THE UNITY OF THE PERSON

127. *Man was created by God in unity of body and soul.* “The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole — *corpore et anima unus* — as a person. These definitions not only point out that the body, which has been promised the resurrection, will also share in glory. They also remind us that reason and free will are linked with all the bodily and sense faculties. *The person, including the body, is completely entrusted to himself, and it is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts.*”

128. *Through his corporeality man unites in himself elements of the material world;* these “reach their summit through him, and through him raise their voice in free praise of the Creator.” This dimension makes it possible for man to be part of the material world, but not as in a prison or in exile. It is not proper to despise bodily life; rather “man ... is obliged to regard his body as good and honorable since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.” Because of this bodily dimension, however, following the wound of sin, man experiences the rebellion of his body and the perverse inclinations of his heart; he must always keep careful watch over these lest he become enslaved to them and become a victim of a purely earthly vision of life.

Through his spirituality man moves beyond the realm of mere things and plunges into the innermost structure of reality. When he enters into his own heart, that is, when he reflects on his destiny, he discovers that he is superior to the material world because of his unique dignity as one who converses with God, under whose gaze he makes decisions about his life. In his inner life he recognizes that the person has “a spiritual and immortal soul” and he knows that the person is not merely “a speck of nature or a nameless constituent of the city of man.”

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



B. OPENNESS TO TRANSCENDENCE AND UNIQUENESS OF THE PERSON

a. Open to transcendence

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

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

b. Unique and unrepeatable

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

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

c. Respect for human dignity

132. A just society can become a reality only when it is based on the respect of the transcendent dignity of the human person. The person represents the ultimate end of society, by which it is ordered to the person: “Hence, the social order and its development must invariably work to the benefit of the human person, since the order of things is to be subordinate to the order of persons, and not the other way around.” Respect for human dignity can in no way be separated from obedience to this principle. It is necessary to “consider every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity.” Every political, economic, social,



scientific and cultural program must be inspired by the awareness of the primacy of each human being over society.

133. *In no case, therefore, is the human person to be manipulated for ends that are foreign to his own development, which can find complete fulfillment only in God and his plan of salvation: in fact, man in his interiority transcends the universe and is the only creature willed by God for itself. For this reason neither his life nor the development of his thought, nor his good, nor those who are part of his personal and social activities can be subjected to unjust restrictions in the exercise of their rights and freedom.*

*The person cannot be a means for carrying out economic, social or political projects imposed by some authority, even in the name of an alleged progress of the civil community as a whole or of other persons, either in the present or the future. It is therefore necessary that public authorities keep careful watch so that restrictions placed on freedom or any onus placed on personal activity will never become harmful to personal dignity, thus guaranteeing the effective practicability of human rights. All this, once more, is based on the vision of man as a *person*, that is to say, as an *active* and *responsible* subject of his own growth process, together with the community to which he belongs.*

134. *Authentic social changes are effective and lasting only to the extent that they are based on resolute changes in personal conduct. An authentic moralization of social life will never be possible unless it starts with people and has people as its point of reference: indeed, “living a moral life bears witness to the dignity of the person.” It is obviously the task of people to develop those moral attitudes that are fundamental for any society that truly wishes to be human (justice, honesty, truthfulness, etc.), and which in no way can simply be expected of others or delegated to institutions. It is the task of everyone, and in a special way of those who hold various forms of political, judicial or professional responsibility with regard to others, to be the watchful conscience of society and the first to bear witness to civil social conditions that are worthy of human beings.*

C. THE FREEDOM OF THE HUMAN PERSON

a. The value and limits of freedom

135. *Man can turn to good only in freedom, which God has given to him as one of the highest signs of his image: “For God has willed that man remain ‘under the control of his own decisions’ (Sir 15:14), 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, neither under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure.”*

Man rightly appreciates freedom and strives for it passionately: rightly does he desire and must form and guide, by his own free initiative, his personal and social life, accepting personal responsibility for it.” In fact, freedom not only allows man suitably to modify the state of things outside of himself, but it also determines the growth of his being as a person through choices consistent with the true good. In this way man generates himself, he is *father* of his own being, he constructs the social order.”

136. *Freedom is not contrary to man's dependence as a creature on God. Revelation teaches that the power to decide good and evil does not belong to man but to God alone (cf. Gen 2:16-17). “Man is certainly free, inasmuch as he can understand and accept God's commands. And he possesses an extremely far-reaching freedom, since he can eat ‘of every tree of the garden.’ But his freedom is not unlimited: it must halt before the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’, for it is called to accept the moral law*



given by God. In fact, human freedom finds its authentic and complete fulfillment precisely in the acceptance of that law.”

137. *The proper exercise of personal freedom requires specific conditions of an economic, social, juridical, political and cultural order* that “are too often disregarded or violated. Such situations of blindness and injustice injure the moral life and involve the strong as well as the weak in the temptation to sin against charity. By deviating from the moral law man violates his own freedom, becomes imprisoned within himself, disrupts neighborly fellowship and rebels against divine truth.” *Removing injustices promotes human freedom and dignity*: nonetheless, “the first thing to be done is to appeal to the spiritual and moral capacities of the individual and to the permanent need for inner conversion, if one is to achieve the economic and social changes that will truly be at the service of man.”

b. The bond uniting freedom with truth and the natural law

138. *In the exercise of their freedom, men and women perform morally good acts that are constructive for the person and for society when they are obedient to truth, that is, when they do not presume to be the creators and absolute masters of truth or of ethical norms.* Freedom in fact does not have “its absolute and unconditional origin ... in itself, but in the life within which it is situated and which represents for it, at one and the same time, both a limitation and a possibility. Human freedom belongs to us as creatures; it is a freedom which is given as a gift, one to be received like a seed and to be cultivated responsibly.” When the contrary is the case, freedom dies, destroying man and society.”

139. *The truth concerning good and evil is recognized in a practical and concrete manner by the judgment of conscience, which leads to the acceptance of responsibility for the good accomplished and the evil committed.* “Consequently in the practical judgment of conscience, which imposes on the person the obligation to perform a given act, *the link between freedom and truth is made manifest.* Precisely for this reason conscience expresses itself in acts of ‘judgment’ which reflect the truth about the good, and not in arbitrary ‘decisions.’ The maturity and responsibility of these judgments — and, when all is said and done, of the individual who is their subject — are not measured by the liberation of the conscience from objective truth, in favor of an alleged autonomy in personal decisions, but, on the contrary, by an insistent search for truth and by allowing oneself to be guided by that truth in one's actions.”

140. *The exercise of freedom implies a reference to a natural moral law, of a universal character, that precedes and unites all rights and duties.* The natural law “is nothing other than the light of intellect infused within us by God. Thanks to this, we know what must be done and what must be avoided. This light or this law has been given by God to creation.” It consists in the participation in his eternal law, which is identified with God himself. This law is called “natural” because the reason that promulgates it is proper to human nature. It is universal, it extends to all people insofar as it is established by reason. In its principal precepts, the divine and natural law is presented in the Decalogue and indicates the primary and essential norms regulating moral life. Its central focus is the act of aspiring and submitting to God, the source and judge of everything that is good, and also the act of seeing others as equal to oneself. The natural law expresses the dignity of the person and lays the foundations of the person's fundamental duties.

141. *In the diversity of cultures, the natural law unites peoples, enjoining common principles.* Although its application may require adaptations to the many different conditions of life according to place, time and circumstances, it remains *immutable* “under the flux of ideas and customs and supports their



progress ... Even when it is rejected in its very principles, it cannot be destroyed or removed from the heart of man. It always rises again in the life of individuals and societies.”

Its precepts, however, are not clearly and immediately perceived by everyone. Religious and moral truths can be known “by everyone with facility, with firm certainty and without the admixture of error” only with the help of Grace and Revelation. The natural law offers a foundation prepared by God for the revealed law and Grace, in full harmony with the work of the Spirit.

142. *The natural law, which is the law of God, cannot be annulled by human sinfulness.* It lays the indispensable moral foundation for building the human community and for establishing the civil law that draws its consequences of a concrete and contingent nature from the principles of the natural law. If the perception of the universality of the moral law is dimmed, people cannot build a true and lasting communion with others, because when a correspondence between truth and good is lacking, “whether culpably or not, our acts damage the communion of persons, to the detriment of each.” Only freedom rooted in a common nature, in fact, can make all men responsible and enable them to justify public morality. Those who proclaim themselves to be the sole measure of realities and of truth cannot live peacefully in society with their fellow men and cooperate with them.

143. *Freedom mysteriously tends to betray the openness to truth and human goodness, and too often it prefers evil and being selfishly closed off, raising itself to the status of a divinity that creates good and evil:* “Although he was made by God in a state of holiness, from the very onset of his history man abused his liberty, at the urging of the Evil One. Man set himself against God and sought to attain his goal apart from God ... Often refusing to acknowledge God as his beginning, man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and all created things.” *Human freedom needs therefore to be liberated.* Christ, by the power of his Paschal Mystery, frees man from his disordered love of self, which is the source of his contempt for his neighbor and of those relationships marked by domination of others. Christ shows us that freedom attains its fulfillment in the gift of self. By his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus places man once more in communion with God and his neighbor.

D. THE EQUAL DIGNITY OF ALL PEOPLE

144. “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34; cf. Rom 2:11; Gal 2:6; Eph 6:9), since all people have the same dignity as creatures made in his image and likeness. The Incarnation of the Son of God shows the equality of all people with regard to dignity: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28; cf. Rom 10:12; 1 Cor 12:13, Col 3:11).

Since something of the glory of God shines on the face of every person, the dignity of every person before God is the basis of the dignity of man before other men. Moreover, this is the ultimate foundation of the radical equality and brotherhood among all people, regardless of their race, nation, sex, origin, culture, or class.

145. *Only the recognition of human dignity can make possible the common and personal growth of everyone* (cf. Jas 2:1-9). To stimulate this kind of growth it is necessary in particular to help the least, effectively ensuring conditions of equal opportunity for men and women and guaranteeing an objective equality between the different social classes before the law.



Also in relations between peoples and States, conditions of equality and parity are prerequisites for the authentic progress of the international community. Despite the steps taken in this direction, it must not forget that there still exist many inequalities and forms of dependence.

Together with equality in the recognition of the dignity of each person and of every people there must also be an awareness that it will be possible to safeguard and promote human dignity only if this is done as a community, by the whole of humanity. Only through the mutual action of individuals and peoples sincerely concerned for the good of all men and women can a genuine universal brotherhood be attained; otherwise, the persistence of conditions of serious disparity and inequality will make us all poorer.

146. *“Male” and “female” differentiate two individuals of equal dignity, which does not however reflect a static equality, because the specificity of the female is different from the specificity of the male, and this difference in equality is enriching and indispensable for the harmony of life in society:* “The condition that will assure the rightful presence of woman in the Church and in society is a more penetrating and accurate consideration of the anthropological foundation for masculinity and femininity with the intent of clarifying woman's personal identity in relation to man, that is, a diversity yet mutual complementarily, not only as it concerns roles to be held and functions to be performed, but also, and more deeply, as it concerns her make-up and meaning as a person.”

147. Woman is the complement of man, as man is the complement of woman: man and woman complete each other mutually, not only from a physical and psychological point of view, but also ontologically. It is only because of the duality of “male” and “female” that the “human” being becomes a full reality. It is the “unity of the two,” or in other words a relational “uni-duality,” that allows each person to experience the interpersonal and reciprocal relationship as a gift that at the same time is a mission: “to this ‘unity of the two’ God has entrusted not only the work of procreation and family life, but the creation of history itself.” “The woman is ‘a helper’ for the man, just as the man is ‘a helper’ for the woman!”: in the encounter of man and woman a unitary conception of the human person is brought about, based not on the logic of self-centeredness and self-affirmation, but on that of love and solidarity.

148. *Persons with disabilities are fully human subjects, with rights and duties:* “in spite of the limitations and sufferings affecting their bodies and faculties, they point up more clearly the dignity and greatness of man.” Since persons with disabilities are subjects with all their rights, they are to be helped to participate in every dimension of family and social life at every level accessible to them and according to their possibilities.

The rights of persons with disabilities need to be promoted with effective and appropriate measures: “It would be radically unworthy of man, and a denial of our common humanity, to admit to the life of the community, and thus admit to work, only those who are fully functional. To do so would be to practice a serious form of discrimination, that of the strong and healthy against the weak and sick.” Great attention must be paid not only to the physical and psychological work conditions, to a just wage, to the possibility of promotion and the elimination of obstacles, but also to the affective and sexual dimensions of persons with disabilities: “They too need to love and to be loved, they need tenderness, closeness and intimacy,” according to their capacities and with respect for the moral order, which is the same for the non-handicapped and the handicapped alike.

E. THE SOCIAL NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS



149. *The human person is essentially a social being because God, who created humanity, willed it so.* Human nature, in fact, reveals itself as a nature of a being who responds to his own needs. This is based on a *relational subjectivity*, that is, in the manner of a free and responsible being who recognizes the necessity of integrating himself in cooperation with his fellow human beings, and who is *capable of communion* with them on the level of knowledge and love. “A *society* is a group of persons bound together organically by a principle of unity that goes beyond each one of them. As an assembly that is at once visible and spiritual, a society endures through time: it gathers up the past and prepares for the future.”

It is therefore necessary to stress that community life is a natural characteristic that distinguishes man from the rest of earthly creatures. Social activity carries in itself a particular sign of man and of humanity that of a person at work within a community of persons: this is the sign that determines man's interior traits and in a sense constitutes his very nature. This relational characteristic takes on, in the light of faith, a more profound and enduring meaning. Made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26), and made visible in the universe in order to live in society (cf. Gen 2:20,23) and exercise dominion over the earth (cf. Gen 1:26,28- 30), the human person is for this reason called from the very beginning to life in society: “God did not create man as a ‘solitary being’ but wished him to be a ‘social being.’ Social life therefore is not exterior to man: he can only grow and realize his vocation in relation with others.”

150. *The social nature of human beings does not automatically lead to communion among persons, to the gift of self.* Because of pride and selfishness, man discovers in himself the seeds of asocial behavior, impulses leading him to close himself within his own individuality and to dominate his neighbor. Every society worthy of the name can be sure that it stands in the truth when all of its members, thanks to their ability to know what is good, are able to pursue it for themselves and for others. It is out of love for one's own good and for that of others that people come together in stable groups with the purpose of attaining a common good. The different human societies also must establish among themselves relationships of solidarity, communication and cooperation, in the service of man and the common good.

151. *The social nature of human beings is not uniform but is expressed in many different ways.* In fact, the common good depends on a healthy *social pluralism*. The different components of society are called to build a unified and harmonious whole, within which it is possible for each element to preserve and develop its own characteristics and autonomy. Some components — such as the family, the civil community and the religious community — respond more immediately to the intimate nature of man, while others come about more on a voluntary basis. “To promote the participation of the greatest number in the life of a society, the creation of voluntary associations and institutions must be encouraged ‘on both national and international levels, which relate to economic and social goals, to cultural and recreational activities, to sport, to various professions, and to political affairs.’ This ‘*socialization*’ also expresses the natural tendency for the sake of attaining objectives that exceed individual capacities. It develops the qualities of the person, especially the sense of initiative and responsibility, and helps guarantee his rights.”

IV. HUMAN RIGHTS

a. The value of human rights



152. *The movement towards the identification and proclamation of human rights is one of the most significant attempts to respond effectively to the inescapable demands of human dignity.* The Church sees in these rights the extraordinary opportunity that our modern times offer, through the affirmation of these rights, for more effectively recognizing human dignity and universally promoting it as a characteristic inscribed by God the Creator in his creature. The Church's Magisterium has not failed to note the positive value of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted by the United Nations on 10 December 1948, which Pope John Paul II defined as “a true milestone on the path of humanity's moral progress.”

153. *In fact, the roots of human rights are to be found in the dignity that belongs to each human being.* This dignity, inherent in human life and equal in every person, is perceived and understood first of all by reason. The natural foundation of rights appears all the more solid when, in light of the supernatural, it is considered that human dignity, after having been given by God and having been profoundly wounded by sin, was taken on and redeemed by Jesus Christ in his incarnation, death and resurrection.

The ultimate source of human rights is not found in the mere will of human beings, in the reality of the State, in public powers, but in man himself and in God his Creator. These rights are “universal, inviolable, inalienable.” *Universal* because they are present in all human beings, without exception of time, place or subject. *Inviolable* insofar as “they are inherent in the human person and in human dignity” and because “it would be vain to proclaim rights, if at the same time everything were not done to ensure the duty of respecting them by all people, everywhere, and for all people.” *Inalienable* insofar as “no one can legitimately deprive another person, whoever they may be, of these rights, since this would do violence to their nature.”

154. Human rights are to be defended not only individually but also as a whole: protecting them only partially would imply a kind of failure to recognize them. They correspond to the demands of human dignity and entail, in the first place, the fulfillment of the essential needs of the person in the material and spiritual spheres. “These rights apply to every stage of life and to every political, social, economic and cultural situation. Together they form a single whole, directed unambiguously towards the promotion of every aspect of the good of both the person and society ... The integral promotion of every category of human rights is the true guarantee of full respect for each individual right.” Universality and indivisibility are distinctive characteristics of human rights: they are “two guiding principles which at the same time demand that human rights be rooted in each culture and that their juridical profile be strengthened so as to ensure that they are fully observed.”

b. The specification of rights

155. *The teachings of Pope John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council, and Pope Paul VI* have given abundant indication of the concept of human rights as articulated by the Magisterium. Pope John Paul II has drawn up a list of them in the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*: “the right to life, an integral part of which is the right of the child to develop in the mother's womb from the moment of conception; the right to *live in* a united family and in a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child's personality; the right to develop one's intelligence and *freedom* in seeking and knowing the *truth*; the right to share in the work which makes wise use of the earth's material resources, and to derive from that work the means to support oneself and one's dependents; and the right *freely to establish* a family, to have and to rear children through the responsible exercise of one's sexuality. In a



certain sense, the source and synthesis of these rights is religious *freedom*, understood as the right to live in the truth of one's faith and in conformity with one's transcendent dignity as a person.”

The first right presented in this list is the right to life, from conception to its natural end, which is the condition for the exercise of all other rights and, in particular, implies the illicitness of every form of procured abortion and of euthanasia. *Emphasis is given to the paramount value of the right to religious freedom*: “all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.” The respect of this right is an indicative sign of “man's authentic progress in any regime, in any society, system or milieu.”

c. Rights and duties

156. *Inextricably connected to the topic of rights is the issue of the duties falling to men and women*, which is given appropriate emphasis in the interventions of the Magisterium. The mutual complementarities between rights and duties — they are indissolubly linked — are recalled several times, above all in the human person who possesses them. This bond also has a social dimension: “in human society to one man's right there corresponds a duty in all other persons: the duty, namely, of acknowledging and respecting the right in question.” *The Magisterium underlines the contradiction inherent in affirming rights without acknowledging corresponding responsibilities*. “Those, therefore, who claim their own rights, yet altogether forget or neglect to carry out their respective duties, are people who build with one hand and destroy with the other.”

d. Rights of peoples and nations

157. *The field of human rights has expanded to include the rights of peoples and nations*: in fact, “what is true for the individual is also true for peoples.” The Magisterium points out that international law “rests upon the principle of equal respect for States, for each people's right to self-determination and for their free cooperation in view of the higher common good of humanity.” Peace is founded not only on respect for human rights but also on respect for the rights of peoples, in particular the right to independence.

The rights of nations are nothing but “human rights' fostered at the specific level of community life.” A nation has a “fundamental right to existence,” to “its own language and culture, through which a people expresses and promotes ... its fundamental spiritual ‘sovereignty’”, to “shape its life according to its own traditions, excluding, of course, every abuse of basic human rights and in particular the oppression of minorities,” to “build its future by providing an appropriate education for the younger generation.” The international order requires a *balance between particularity and universality*, which all nations are called to bring about, for their primary duty is to live in a posture of peace, respect and solidarity with other nations.

e. Filling in the gap between the letter and the spirit

158. *The solemn proclamation of human rights is contradicted by a painful reality of violations*, wars and violence of every kind, in the first place, genocides and mass deportations, the spreading on a virtual worldwide dimension of ever new forms of slavery such as trafficking in human beings, child



soldiers, the exploitation of workers, illegal drug trafficking, prostitution. “Even in countries with democratic forms of government, these rights are not always fully respected.”

Unfortunately, there is a gap between the “letter” and the “spirit” of human rights, which can often be attributed to a merely formal recognition of these rights. The Church's social doctrine, in consideration of the privilege accorded by the Gospel to the poor, repeats over and over that “the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others” and that an excessive affirmation of equality “can give rise to an individualism in which each one claims his own rights without wishing to be answerable for the common good.”

159. *The Church, aware that her essentially religious mission includes the defense and promotion of human rights, “holds in high esteem the dynamic approach of today which is everywhere fostering these rights.”* The Church profoundly experiences the need to respect justice and human rights within her own ranks.

This pastoral commitment develops in a twofold direction: in the proclamation of the Christian foundations of human rights and in the denunciation of the violations of these rights. In any event, “proclamation is always more important than denunciation, and the latter cannot ignore the former, which gives it true solidity and the force of higher motivation.” For greater effectiveness, this commitment is open to ecumenical cooperation, to dialogue with other religions, to all appropriate contacts with other organizations, governmental and non-governmental, at the national and international levels. The Church trusts above all in the help of the Lord and his Spirit who, poured forth into human hearts, is the surest guarantee for respecting justice and human rights, and for contributing to peace. “The promotion of justice and peace and the penetration of all spheres of human society with the light and the leaven of the Gospel have always been the object of the Church's efforts in fulfillment of the Lord's command.”



Redemptor Hominis, 7-17

II. THE MYSTERY OF THE REDEMPTION

7. *Within the Mystery of Christ* — While the ways on which the Council of this century has set the Church going, ways indicated by the late Pope Paul VI in his first Encyclical, will continue to be for a long time the ways that all of us must follow, we can at the same time rightly ask at this new stage: How, in what manner should we continue? What should we do, in order that this new advent of the Church connected with the approaching end of the second millennium may bring us closer to him whom Sacred Scripture calls "Everlasting Father," Pater futuri saeculi? This is the fundamental question that the new Pope must put to himself on accepting in a spirit of obedience in faith the call corresponding to the command that Christ gave Peter several times: "Feed my lambs," meaning: Be the shepherd of my sheepfold, and again: "And when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren."

To this question, dear Brothers, sons and daughters, a fundamental and essential response must be given. Our response must be: Our spirit is set in one direction, the only direction for our intellect, will and heart is-towards Christ our Redeemer, towards Christ, the Redeemer of man. We wish to look towards him-because there is salvation in no one else but him, the Son of God-repeating what Peter said: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Through the Church's consciousness, which the Council considerably developed, through all levels of this self-awareness, and through all the fields of activity in which the Church expresses, finds and confirms herself, we must constantly aim at him "who is the head" "through whom are all things and through whom we exist," who is both "the way, and the truth" and "the resurrection and the life," seeing whom, we see the Father, and who had to go away from us-that is, by his death on the Cross and then by his Ascension into heaven-in order that the Counselor should come to us and should keep coming to us as the Spirit of truth. In him are "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and the Church is his Body. "By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign and means of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind," and the source of this is he, he himself, he the Redeemer.

The Church does not cease to listen to his words. She rereads them continually. With the greatest devotion she reconstructs every detail of his life. These words are listened to also by non-Christians. The life of Christ speaks, also, to many who are not capable of repeating with Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. He, the Son of the living God, speaks to people also as Man: it is his life that speaks, his humanity, his fidelity to the truth, his all-embracing love. Furthermore, his death on the Cross speaks-that is to say the inscrutable depth of his suffering and abandonment. The Church never ceases to relive his death on the Cross and his Resurrection, which constitute the content of the Church's daily life. Indeed, it is by the command of Christ himself, her Master, that the Church unceasingly celebrates the Eucharist, finding in it the "fountain of life and holiness," the efficacious sign of grace and reconciliation with God, and the pledge of eternal life. The Church lives his mystery, draws unwearingly from it and continually seeks ways of bringing this mystery of her Master and Lord to humanity-to the peoples, the nations, the succeeding generations, and every individual human being-as if she were ever repeating, as the Apostle did: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." The Church stays within the sphere of the mystery of the Redemption, which has become the fundamental principle of her life and mission.



8. *Redemption as a new creation* — The Redeemer of the world! In him has been revealed in a new and more wonderful way the fundamental truth concerning creation to which the Book of Genesis gives witness when it repeats several times: "God saw that it was good. The good has its source in Wisdom and Love. In Jesus Christ the visible world which God created for man—the world that, when sin entered, "was subjected to futility"—recovers again its original link with the divine source of Wisdom and Love. Indeed, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." As this link was broken in the man Adam, so in the Man Christ it was reforged. Are we of the twentieth century not convinced of the overpoweringly eloquent words of the Apostle of the Gentiles concerning the "creation (that) has been groaning in travail together until now" — and "waits with eager longing for the revelation of the sons of God," the creation that "was subjected to futility?" Does not the previously unknown immense progress—which has taken place especially in the course of this century—in the field of man's dominion over the world itself reveal—to a previously unknown degree—that manifold subjection "to futility?" It is enough to recall certain phenomena, such as the threat of pollution of the natural environment in areas of rapid industrialization, or the armed conflicts continually breaking out over and over again, or the prospects of self-destruction through the use of atomic, hydrogen, neutron and similar weapons, or the lack of respect for the life of the unborn. The world of the new age, the world of space flights, the world of the previously unattained conquests of science and technology—is it not also the world "groaning in travail" —that "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God?"

In its penetrating analysis of "the modern world," the Second Vatican Council reached that most important point of the visible world that is man, by penetrating like Christ the depth of human consciousness and by making contact with the inward mystery of man, which in Biblical and non-Biblical language is expressed by the word "heart." Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his "heart." Rightly therefore does the Second Vatican Council teach: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come (*Rom 5:14*), Christ the Lord. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, *fully reveals man to himself* and brings to light his most high calling." And the Council continues: "He who is the 'image of the invisible God' (*Col 1:15*), is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his Incarnation, he, the son of God, *in a certain way united himself with each man*. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin," he, the Redeemer of man.

9. *The divine dimension of the mystery of the Redemption* — As we reflect again on this stupendous text from the Council's teaching, we do not forget even for a moment that Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, become our reconciliation with the Father. He it was, and he alone, who satisfied the Father's eternal love, that fatherhood that from the beginning found expression in creating the world, giving man all the riches of creation, and making him "little less than God," in that he was created "in the image and after the likeness of God." He and he alone also satisfied that fatherhood of God and that love which man in a way rejected by breaking the first Covenant and the later covenants that God "again and again offered to man." The redemption of the world—this tremendous mystery of love in



which creation is renewed — is, at its deepest root, the fullness of justice in a human Heart-the Heart of the First-born Son — in order that it may become justice in the hearts of many human beings, predestined from eternity in the Firstborn Son to be children of God and called to grace, called to love. The Cross on Calvary, through which Jesus Christ—a Man, the Son of the Virgin Mary, thought to be the son of Joseph of Nazareth—"leaves" this world, is also a fresh manifestation of the eternal fatherhood of God, who in him draws near again to humanity, to each human being, giving him the thrice holy "Spirit of truth."

This revelation of the Father and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which stamp an indelible seal on the mystery of the Redemption, explain the meaning of the Cross and death of Christ. The God of creation is revealed as the God of redemption, as the God who is "faithful to himself," and faithful to his love for man and the world, which he revealed on the day of creation. His is a love that does not draw back before anything that justice requires in him. Therefore "for our sake (God) made him (the Son) to be sin who knew no sin." If he "made to be sin" him who was without any sin whatever, it was to reveal the love that is always greater than the whole of creation, the love that is he himself, since "God is love." Above all, love is greater than sin, than weakness, than the "futility of creation," it is stronger than death; it is a love always ready to raise up and forgive, always ready to go to meet the prodigal son" always looking for "the revealing of the sons of God," who are called to the glory that is to be revealed." This revelation of love is also described as mercy and in man's history this revelation of love and mercy has taken a form and a name: that of Jesus Christ.

10. *The human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption* — Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself." If we may use the expression, this is the human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption. In this dimension man finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity. In the mystery of the Redemption man becomes newly "expressed" and, in a way, is newly created. He is newly created! "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly—and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being—he must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter into him with all his own self, he must "appropriate" and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself. How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he "gained so great a Redeemer," and if God "gave his only Son in order that man "should not perish but have eternal life?"

In reality, the name for that deep amazement at man's worth and dignity is the Gospel, that is to say: the Good News. It is also called Christianity. This amazement determines the Church's mission in the world and, perhaps even more so, "in the modern world." This amazement, which is also a conviction and a certitude—at its deepest root it is the certainty of faith, but in a hidden and mysterious way it vivifies every aspect of authentic humanism—is closely connected with Christ. It also fixes Christ's place—so to speak, his particular right of citizenship—in the history of man and mankind. Unceasingly contemplating the whole of Christ's mystery, the Church knows with all the certainty of faith that the



Redemption that took place through the Cross has definitively restored his dignity to man and given back meaning to his life in the world, a meaning that was lost to a considerable extent because of sin. And for that reason, the Redemption was accomplished in the paschal mystery, leading through the Cross and death to Resurrection.

The Church's fundamental function in every age and particularly in ours is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of God, to help all men to be familiar with the profundity of the Redemption taking place in Christ Jesus. At the same time man's deepest sphere is involved—we mean the sphere of human hearts, consciences and events.

11. The mystery of Christ as the basis of the Church's mission and of Christianity — The Second Vatican Council did immense work to form that full and universal awareness by the Church of which Pope Paul VI wrote in his first Encyclical. This awareness—or rather self-awareness—by the Church is formed "in dialogue"; and before this dialogue becomes a conversation, attention must be directed to "the other," that is to say: the person with whom we wish to speak. The Ecumenical Council gave a fundamental impulse to forming the Church's self-awareness by so adequately and competently presenting to us a view of the terrestrial globe as a map of various religions. It showed furthermore that this map of the world's religions has superimposed on it, in previously unknown layers typical of our time, the phenomenon of atheism in its various forms, beginning with the atheism that is programmed, organized and structured as a political system.

With regard to religion, what is dealt with is in the first place religion as a universal phenomenon linked with man's history from the beginning, then the various non-Christian religions, and finally Christianity itself. The Council document on non-Christian religions, in particular, is filled with deep esteem for the great spiritual values, indeed for the primacy of the spiritual, which in the life of mankind finds expression in religion and then in morality, with direct effects on the whole of culture. The Fathers of the Church rightly saw in the various religions as it were so many reflections of the one truth, "seeds of the Word," attesting that, though the routes taken may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words for the full meaning of human life. The Council gave particular attention to the Jewish religion, recalling the great spiritual heritage common to Christians and Jews. It also expressed its esteem for the believers of Islam, whose faith also looks to Abraham."

The opening made by the Second Vatican Council has enabled the Church and all Christians to reach a more complete awareness of the mystery of Christ, "the mystery hidden for ages" in God, to be revealed in time in the Man Jesus Christ, and to be revealed continually in every time. In Christ and through Christ God has revealed himself fully to mankind and has definitively drawn close to it; at the same time, in Christ and through Christ man has acquired full awareness of his dignity, of the heights to which he is raised, of the surpassing worth of his own humanity, and of the meaning of his existence.

All of us who are Christ's followers must therefore meet and unite around him. This unity in the various fields of the life, tradition, structures and discipline of the individual Christian Churches and ecclesial Communities cannot be brought about without effective work aimed at getting to know each other and removing the obstacles blocking the way to perfect unity. However, we can and must immediately reach and display to the world our unity in proclaiming the mystery of Christ, in revealing the divine dimension and also the human dimension of the Redemption, and in struggling with



unwearying perseverance for the dignity that each human being has reached and can continually reach in Christ, namely the dignity of both the grace of divine adoption and the inner truth of humanity, a truth which-if in the common awareness of the modern world it has been given such fundamental importance-for us is still clearer in the light of the reality that is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the stable principle and fixed center of the mission that God himself has entrusted to man. We must all share in this mission and concentrate all our forces on it, since it is more necessary than ever for modern mankind. If this mission seems to encounter greater opposition nowadays than ever before, this shows that today it is more necessary than ever and, in spite of the opposition, more awaited than ever. Here we touch indirectly on the mystery of the divine "economy" which linked salvation and grace with the Cross. It was not without reason that Christ said that "the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force" and moreover that "the children of this world are more astute... than are the children of light." We gladly accept this rebuke, that we may be like those "violent people of God" that we have so often seen in the history of the Church and still see today, and that we may consciously join in the great mission of revealing Christ to the world, helping each person to find himself in Christ, and helping the contemporary generations of our brothers and sisters, the peoples, nations, States, mankind, developing countries and countries of opulence-in short, helping everyone to get to know "the unsearchable riches of Christ," since these riches are for every individual and are everybody's property.

12. *The Church's mission and human freedom* — In this unity in mission, which is decided principally by Christ himself, all Christians must find what already unites them, even before their full communion is achieved. This is apostolic and missionary unity, missionary and apostolic unity. Thanks to this unity we can together come close to the magnificent heritage of the human spirit that has been manifested in all religions, as the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate* says. It also enables us to approach all cultures, all ideological concepts, and all people of good will. We approach them with the esteem, respect and discernment that since the time of the Apostles has marked the *missionary* attitude, the attitude *of the missionary*. Suffice it to mention Saint Paul and, for instance, his address in the Areopagus at Athens." The *missionary* attitude always begins with a feeling of deep esteem for "what is in man," for what man has himself. worked out in the depths of his spirit concerning the most profound and important problems. It is a question of respecting everything that has been brought about in him by the Spirit, which "blows where it wills." The mission is never destruction, but instead is a taking up and fresh building, even if in practice there has not always been full correspondence with this high ideal. And we know well that the conversion that is begun by the mission is a work of grace, in which man must fully find himself again.

For this reason the Church in our time attaches great importance to all that is stated by the Second Vatican Council in its *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, both the first and the second part of the document: We perceive intimately that the truth revealed to us by God imposes on us an obligation. We have, in particular, a great sense of responsibility for this truth. By Christ's institution the Church is its guardian and teacher, having been endowed with a unique assistance of the Holy Spirit in order to guard and teach it in its most exact integrity. In fulfilling this mission, we look towards Christ himself, the first evangelizer, and also towards his Apostles, martyrs and confessors. The *Declaration on Religious Freedom* shows us convincingly that, when Christ and, after him, his Apostles proclaimed the truth that comes not from men but from God ("My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me," that is the Father's), they preserved, while acting with their full force of spirit, a deep esteem for man,



for his intellect, his will, his conscience and his freedom: Thus the human person's dignity itself becomes part of the content of that proclamation, being included not necessarily in words but by an attitude towards it. This attitude seems to fit the special needs of our times. Since man's true freedom is not found in everything that the various systems and individuals see and propagate as freedom, the Church, because of her divine mission, becomes all the more the guardian of this freedom, which is the condition and basis for the human person's true dignity.

Jesus Christ meets the man of every age, including our own, with the same words: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." These words contain both a fundamental requirement and a warning: the requirement of an honest relationship with regard to truth as a condition for authentic freedom, and the warning to avoid every kind of illusory freedom, every superficial unilateral freedom, every freedom that fails to enter into the whole truth about man and the world. Today also, even after two thousand years, we see Christ as the one who brings man freedom based on truth, frees man from what curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in man's soul, his heart and his conscience. What a stupendous confirmation of this has been given and is still being given by those who, thanks to Christ and in Christ, have reached true freedom and have manifested it even in situations of external constraint!

When Jesus Christ himself appeared as a prisoner before Pilate's tribunal and was interrogated by him about the accusation made against him by the representatives of the Sanhedrin, did he not answer: "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth?" It was as if with these words spoken before the judge at the decisive moment he was once more confirming what he had said earlier: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." In the course of so many centuries, of so many generations, from the time of the Apostles on, is it not often Jesus Christ himself that has made an appearance at the side of people judged for the sake of the truth? And has he not gone to death with people condemned for the sake of the truth? Does he ever cease to be the continuous spokesman and advocate for the person who lives "in spirit and truth?" Just as he does not cease to be it before the Father, he is it also with regard to the history of man. And in her turn the Church, in spite of all the weaknesses that are part of her human history, does not cease to follow him who said: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

III. REDEEMED MAN AND HIS SITUATION IN THE MODERN WORLD

13. *Christ united himself with each man* — When we penetrate by means of the continually and rapidly increasing experience of the human family into the mystery of Jesus Christ, we understand with greater clarity that there is at the basis of all these ways that the Church of our time must follow, in accordance with the wisdom of Pope Paul VI, one single way: it is the way that has stood the test of centuries and it is also the way of the future. Christ the Lord indicated this way especially, when, as the Council teaches, "by his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, in a certain way *united himself with each man*." The Church therefore sees its fundamental task in enabling that union to be brought about and renewed continually. The Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life, with the power of the truth about man and the world that is contained in the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption and with the power of the love that is radiated by that truth. Against a background of the ever increasing



historical processes, which seem at the present time to have results especially within the spheres of various systems, ideological concepts of the world and regimes, Jesus Christ becomes, in a way, newly present, in spite of all his apparent absences, in spite of all the limitations of the presence and of the institutional activity of the Church. Jesus Christ becomes present with the power of the truth and the love that are expressed in him with unique unrepeatable fullness in spite of the shortness of his life on earth and the even greater shortness of his public activity.

Jesus Christ is the chief way for the Church. He himself is our way "to the Father's house" and is the way to each man. On this way leading from Christ to man, on this way on which Christ unites himself with each man, nobody can halt the Church. This is an exigency of man's temporal welfare and of his eternal welfare. Out of regard for Christ and in view of the mystery that constitutes the Church's own life, the Church cannot remain insensible to whatever serves man's true welfare, any more than she can remain indifferent to what threatens it. In various passages in its documents the Second Vatican Council has expressed the Church's fundamental solicitude that life in "the world should conform more to man's surpassing dignity" in all its aspects, so as to make that life "ever more human." This is the solicitude of Christ himself, the good Shepherd of all men. In the name of this solicitude, as we read in the Council's Pastoral Constitution, "the Church must in no way be confused with the political community, nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the human person."

Accordingly, what is in question here is man in all his truth, in his full magnitude. We are not dealing with the "abstract" man, but the real, "concrete," "historical" man. We are dealing with "each" man, for each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption and with each one Christ has united himself for ever through this mystery. Every man comes into the world through being conceived in his mother's womb and being born of his mother, and precisely on account of the mystery of the Redemption is entrusted to the solicitude of the Church. Her solicitude is about the whole man and is focused on him in an altogether special manner. The object of her care is man in his unique unrepeatable human reality, which keeps intact the image and likeness of God himself. The Council points out this very fact when, speaking of that likeness, it recalls that "man is the only creature on earth that God willed for itself." Man as "willed" by God, as "chosen" by him from eternity and called, destined for grace and glory—this is "each" man, "the most concrete" man, "the most real"; this is man in all the fullness of the mystery in which he has become a sharer in Jesus Christ, the mystery in which each one of the four thousand million human beings living on our planet has become a sharer from the moment he is conceived beneath the heart of his mother.

14. For the Church all ways lead to man — The Church cannot abandon man, for his "destiny," that is to say his election, calling, birth and death, salvation or perdition, is so closely and unbreakably linked with Christ. We are speaking precisely of each man on this planet, this earth that the Creator gave to the first man, saying to the man and the women: "subdue it and have dominion." Each man in all the unrepeatable reality of what he is and what he does, of his intellect and will, of his conscience and heart. Man who in his reality has, because he is a "person," a history of his life that is his own and, most important, a history of his soul that is his own. Man who, in keeping with the openness of his spirit within and also with the many diverse needs of his body and his existence in time, writes this personal history of his through numerous bonds, contacts, situations, and social structures linking him with other men, beginning to do so from the first moment of his existence on earth, from the moment of his conception and birth. Man in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and also of his



community and social being—in the sphere of his own family, in the sphere of society and very diverse contexts, in the sphere of his own nation or people (perhaps still only that of his clan or tribe), and in the sphere of the whole of mankind—this man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: he is the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption.

It was precisely this man in all the truth of his life, in his conscience, in his continual inclination to sin and at the same time in his continual aspiration to truth, the good, the beautiful, justice and love that the Second Vatican Council had before its eyes when, in outlining his situation in the modern world, it always passed from the external elements of this situation to the truth within humanity: "In man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways. On the other, he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions, he is constantly forced to choose among them and to renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. Hence he suffers from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society."

This man is the way for the Church—a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways that the Church must walk—because man—every man without any exception whatever—has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man—with each man without any exception whatever—Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it: "Christ, who died and was raised up for all, provides man"—each man and every man—"with the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme calling."

Since this man is the way for the Church, the way for her daily life and experience, for her mission and toil, the Church of today must be aware in an always new manner of man's "situation." That means that she must be aware of his possibilities, which keep returning to their proper bearings and thus revealing themselves. She must likewise be aware of the threats to man and of all that seems to oppose the endeavor "to make human life ever more human" and make every element of this life correspond to man's true dignity—in a word, she must be aware of *all that is opposed* to that process.

15. What modern man is afraid of—Accordingly, while keeping alive in our memory the picture that was so perspicaciously and authoritatively traced by the Second Vatican Council, we shall try once more to adapt it to the "signs of the times" and to the demands of the situation, which is continually changing and evolving in certain directions.

The man of today seems ever to be under threat from what he produces, that is to say from the result of the work of his hands and, even more so, of the work of his intellect and the tendencies of his will. All too soon, and often in an unforeseeable way, what this manifold activity of man yields is not only subjected to "alienation," in the sense that it is simply taken away from the person who produces it, but rather it turns against man himself, at least in part, through the indirect consequences of its effects returning on himself. It is or can be directed against him. This seems to make up the main chapter of the drama of present-day human existence in its broadest and universal dimension. Man therefore lives increasingly in fear. He is afraid that what he produces—not all of it, of course, or even most of it, but part of it and precisely that part that contains a special share of his genius and initiative—can radically turn against himself; he is afraid that it can become the means and instrument for an unimaginable self-destruction, compared with which all the cataclysms and catastrophes of history known to us seem to fade away. This gives rise to a question: Why is it that the power given to man



from the beginning by which he was to subdue the earth turns against himself, producing an understandable state of disquiet, of conscious or unconscious fear and of menace, which in various ways is being communicated to the whole of the present-day human family and is manifesting itself under various aspects?

This state of menace for man from what he produces shows itself in various directions and various degrees of intensity. We seem to be increasingly aware of the fact that the exploitation of the earth, the planet on which we are living, demands rational and honest planning. At the same time, exploitation of the earth not only for industrial but also for military purposes and the uncontrolled development of technology outside the framework of a long-range authentically humanistic plan often bring with them a threat to man's natural environment, alienate him in his relations with nature and remove him from nature. Man often seems to see no other meaning in his natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption. Yet it was the Creator's will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble "master" and "guardian," and not as a heedless "exploiter" and "destroyer."

The development of technology and the development of contemporary civilization, which is marked by the ascendancy of technology, demand a proportional development of morals and ethics. For the present, this last development seems unfortunately to be always left behind. Accordingly, in spite of the marvel of this progress, in which it is difficult not to see also authentic signs of man's greatness, signs that in their creative seeds were revealed to us in the pages of the Book of Genesis, as early as where it describes man's creation, this progress cannot fail to give rise to disquiet on many counts. The first reason for disquiet concerns the essential and fundamental question: Does this progress, which has man for its author and promoter, make human life on earth "more human" in every aspect of that life? Does it make it more "worthy of man?" There can be no doubt that in various aspects it does. But the question keeps coming back with regard to what is most essential -whether in the context of this progress man, as man, is becoming truly better, that is to say more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all.

This question must be put by Christians, precisely because Jesus Christ has made them so universally sensitive about the problem of man. The same question must be asked by all men, especially those belonging to the social groups that are dedicating themselves actively to development and progress today. As we observe and take part in these processes we cannot let ourselves be taken over merely by euphoria or be carried away by one-sided enthusiasm for our conquests, but we must all ask ourselves, with absolute honesty, objectivity and a sense of moral responsibility, the essential questions concerning man's situation today and in the future. Do all the conquests attained until now and those projected for the future for technology accord with man's moral and spiritual progress? In this context is man, as man, developing and progressing or is he regressing and being degraded in his humanity? In men and "in man's world," which in itself is a world of moral good and evil, does good prevail over evil? In men and among men is there a growth of social love, of respect for the rights of others-for every man, nation and people-or on the contrary is there an increase of various degrees of selfishness, exaggerated nationalism instead of authentic love of country, and also the propensity to dominate others beyond the limits of one's legitimate rights and merits and the propensity to exploit the whole of material progress and that in the technology of production for the exclusive purpose of dominating others or of favoring this or that imperialism?



These are the essential questions that the Church is bound to ask herself, since they are being asked with greater or less explicitness by the thousands of millions of people now living in the world. The subject of development and progress is on everybody's lips and appears in the columns of all the newspapers and other publications in all the languages of the modern world. Let us not forget however that this subject contains not only affirmations and certainties but also questions and points of anguished disquiet. The latter are no less important than the former. They fit in with the dialectical nature of human knowledge and even more with the fundamental need for solicitude by man for man, for his humanity, and for the future of people on earth. Inspired by eschatological faith, the Church considers an essential, unbreakably united element of her mission this solicitude for man, for his humanity, for the future of men on earth and therefore also for the course set for the whole of development and progress. She finds the principle of this solicitude in Jesus Christ himself, as the Gospels witness. This is why she wishes to make it grow continually through her relationship with Christ, reading man's situation in the modern world in accordance with the most important signs of our time.

16. Progress or threat — If therefore our time, the time of our generation, the time that is approaching the end of the second millennium of the Christian era, shows itself a time of great progress, it is also seen as a time of threat in many forms for man. The Church must speak of this threat to all people of good will and must always carry on a dialogue with them about it. Man's situation in the modern world seems indeed to be far removed from the objective demands of the moral order, from the requirements of justice, and even more of social love. We are dealing here only with that which found expression in the Creator's first message to man at the moment in which he was giving him the earth, to "subdue" it." This first message was confirmed by Christ the Lord in the mystery of the Redemption. This is expressed by the Second Vatican Council in these beautiful chapters of its teaching that concern man's "kingship"; that is to say his call to share in the kingly function—the *munus regale* of Christ himself. The essential meaning of this "kingship" and "dominion" of man over the visible world, which the Creator himself gave man for his task, consists in the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and in the superiority of spirit over matter.

This is why all phases of present-day progress must be followed attentively. Each stage of that progress must, so to speak, be x-rayed from this point of view. What is in question is the advancement of persons, not just the multiplying of things that people can use. It is a matter—as a contemporary philosopher has said and as the Council has stated—not so much of "having more" as of "being more." Indeed there is already a real perceptible danger that, while man's dominion over the world of things is making enormous advances, he should lose the essential threads of his dominion and in various ways let his humanity be subjected to the world and become himself something subject to manipulation in many ways—even if the manipulation is often not perceptible directly—through the whole of the organization of community life, through the production system and through pressure from the means of social communication. Man cannot relinquish himself or the place in the visible world that belongs to him; he cannot become the slave of things, the slave of economic systems, the slave of production, the slave of his own products. A civilization purely materialistic in outline condemns man to such slavery, even if at times, no doubt, this occurs contrary to the intentions and the very premises of its pioneers. The present solicitude for man certainly has at its root this problem. It is not a matter here merely of giving an abstract answer to the question: Who is man? It is a matter of the whole of the



dynamism of life and civilization. It is a matter of the meaningfulness of the various initiatives of everyday life and also of the premises for many civilization programs, political programs, economic ones, social ones, state ones, and many others.

If we make bold to describe man's situation in the modern world as far removed from the objective demands of the moral order, from the exigencies of justice, and still more from social love, we do so because this is confirmed by the well-known facts and comparisons that have already on various occasions found an echo in the pages of statements by the Popes, the Council and the Synod¹⁰³. Man's situation today is certainly not uniform but marked with numerous differences. These differences have causes in history, but they also have strong ethical effects. Indeed everyone is familiar with the picture of the consumer civilization, which consists in a certain surplus of goods necessary for man and for entire societies-and we are dealing precisely with the rich highly developed societies-while the remaining societies-at least broad sectors of them-are suffering from hunger, with many people dying each day of starvation and malnutrition. Hand in hand go a certain abuse of freedom by one group-an abuse linked precisely with a consumer attitude uncontrolled by ethics -and a limitation by it of the freedom of the others, that is to say those suffering marked shortages and being driven to conditions of even worse misery and destitution.

This pattern, which is familiar to all, and the contrast referred to, in the documents giving their teaching, by the Popes of this century, most recently by John XXIII and by Paul VI, represent, as it were, the gigantic development of the parable in the Bible of the rich banqueter and the poor man Lazarus." So widespread is the phenomenon that it brings into question the financial, monetary, production and commercial mechanisms that, resting on various political pressures, support the world economy. These are proving incapable either of remedying the unjust social situations inherited from the past or of dealing with the urgent challenges and ethical demands of the present. By submitting man to tensions created by himself, dilapidating at an accelerated pace material and energy resources, and compromising the geophysical environment, these structures unceasingly make the areas of misery spread, accompanied by anguish, frustration and bitterness.

We have before us here a great drama that can leave nobody indifferent. The person who, on the one hand, is trying to draw the maximum profit and, on the other hand, is paying the price in damage and injury is always man. The drama is made still worse by the presence close at hand of the privileged social classes and of the rich countries, which accumulate goods to an excessive degree and the misuse of whose riches very often becomes the cause of various ills. Add to this the fever of inflation and the plague of unemployment -these are further symptoms of the moral disorder that is being noticed in the world situation and therefore requires daring creative resolves in keeping with man's authentic dignity.

Such a task is not an impossible one. The principle of solidarity, in a wide sense, must inspire the effective search for appropriate institutions and mechanisms, whether in the sector of trade, where the laws of healthy competition must be allowed to lead the way, or on the level of a wider and more immediate redistribution of riches and of control over them, in order that the economically developing peoples may be able not only to satisfy their essential needs but also to advance gradually and effectively.

This difficult road of the indispensable transformation of the structures of economic life is one on which it will not be easy to go forward without the intervention of a true conversion of mind, will and heart. The task requires resolute commitment by individuals and peoples that are free and linked in



solidarity. All too often freedom is confused with the instinct for individual or collective interest or with the instinct for combat and domination, whatever be the ideological colors with which they are covered. Obviously these instincts exist and are operative, but no truly human economy will be possible unless they are taken up, directed and dominated by the deepest powers in man, which decide the true culture of peoples. These are the very sources for the effort which will express man's true freedom and which will be capable of ensuring it in the economic field also. Economic development, with every factor in its adequate functioning, must be constantly programmed and realized within a perspective of universal joint development of each individual and people, as was convincingly recalled by my Predecessor Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*. Otherwise, the category of "economic progress" becomes in isolation a superior category subordinating the whole of human existence to its partial demands, suffocating man, breaking up society, and ending by entangling itself in its own tensions and excesses.

It is possible to undertake this duty. This is testified by the certain facts and the results, which it would be difficult to mention more analytically here. However, one thing is certain: at the basis of this gigantic sector it is necessary to establish, accept and deepen the sense of moral responsibility, which man must undertake. Again and always man.

This responsibility becomes especially evident for us Christians when we recall—and we should always recall it—the scene of the last judgment according to the words of Christ related in Matthew's Gospel.

This eschatological scene must always be "applied" to man's history; it must always be made the "measure" for human acts as an essential outline for an examination of conscience by each and every one: "I was hungry and you gave me no food ... naked and you did not clothe me... in prison and you did not visit me." These words become charged with even stronger warning, when we think that, instead of bread and cultural aid, the new States and nations awakening to independent life are being offered, sometimes in abundance, modern weapons and means of destruction placed at the service of armed conflicts and wars that are not so much a requirement for defending their just rights and their sovereignty but rather a form of chauvinism, imperialism, and neocolonialism of one kind or another. We all know well that the areas of misery and hunger on our globe could have been made fertile in a short time, if the gigantic investments for armaments at the service of war and destruction had been changed into investments for food at the service of life.

This consideration will perhaps remain in part an "abstract" one. It will perhaps offer both "sides" an occasion for mutual accusation, each forgetting its own faults. It will perhaps provoke new accusations against the Church. The Church, however, which has no weapons at her disposal apart from those of the spirit, of the word and of love, cannot renounce her proclamation of "the word ... in season and out of season." For this reason she does not cease to implore each side of the two and to beg everybody in the name of God and in the name of man: Do not kill! Do not prepare destruction and extermination for men! Think of your brothers and sisters who are suffering hunger and misery! Respect each one's dignity and freedom!

17. Human rights: "letter" or "spirit" — This century has so far been a century of great calamities for man, of great devastations, not only material ones but also moral ones, indeed perhaps above all moral ones. Admittedly it is not easy to compare one age or one century with another under this aspect, since that depends also on changing historical standards. Nevertheless, without applying these comparisons, one still cannot fail to see that this century has so far been one in which people have provided many injustices and sufferings for themselves. Has this process been decisively curbed? In



any case, we cannot fail to recall at this point, with esteem and profound hope for the future, the magnificent effort made to give life to the United Nations Organization, an effort conducive to the definition and establishment of man's objective and inviolable rights, with the member States obliging each other to observe them rigorously. This commitment has been accepted and ratified by almost all present-day States, and this should constitute a guarantee that human rights will become throughout the world a fundamental principle of work for man's welfare.

There is no need for the Church to confirm how closely this problem is linked with her mission in the modern world. Indeed it is at the very basis of social and international peace, as has been declared by John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council, and later Paul VI, in detailed documents. After all, peace comes down to respect for man's inviolable rights—*Opus iustitiae pax*—while war springs from the violation of these rights and brings with it still graver violations of them. If human rights are violated in time of peace, this is particularly painful and from the point of view of progress it represents an incomprehensible manifestation of activity directed against man, which can in no way be reconciled with any program that describes itself as "humanistic." And what social, economic, political or cultural program could renounce this description? We are firmly convinced that there is no program in today's world in which man is not invariably brought to the fore, even when the platforms of the programs are made up of conflicting ideologies concerning the way of conceiving the world.

If, in spite of these premises, human rights are being violated in various ways, if in practice we see before us concentration camps, violence, torture, terrorism, and discrimination in many forms, this must then be the consequence of the other premises, undermining and often almost annihilating the effectiveness of the humanistic premises of these modern programs and systems. This necessarily imposes the duty to submit these programs to continual revision from the point of view of the objective and inviolable rights of man.

The Declaration of Human Rights linked with the setting up of the United Nations Organization certainly had as its aim not only to depart from the horrible experiences of the last world war but also to create the basis for continual revision of programs, systems and regimes precisely from this single fundamental point of view, namely the welfare of man—or, let us say, of the person in the community—which must, as a fundamental factor in the common good, constitute the essential criterion for all programs, systems and regimes. If the opposite happens, human life is, even in time of peace, condemned to various sufferings and, along with these sufferings, there is a development of various forms of domination, totalitarianism, neocolonialism and imperialism, which are a threat also to the harmonious living together of the nations. Indeed, it is a significant fact, repeatedly confirmed by the experiences of history, that violation of the rights of man goes hand in hand with violation of the rights of the nation, with which man is united by organic links as with a larger family.

Already in the first half of this century, when various State totalitarianisms were developing, which, as is well known, led to the horrible catastrophe of war, the Church clearly outlined her position with regard to these regimes that to all appearances were acting for a higher good, namely the good of the State, while history was to show instead that the good in question was only that of a certain party, which had been identified with the State. In reality, those regimes had restricted the rights of the citizens, denying them recognition precisely of those inviolable human rights that have reached formulation on the international level in the middle of our century. While sharing the joy of all people of good will, of all people who truly love justice and peace, at this conquest, the Church, aware that the "letter" on its own can kill, while only "the spirit gives life," must continually ask, together with



these people of good will, whether the Declaration of Human Rights and the acceptance of their "letter" mean everywhere also the actualization of their "spirit." Indeed, well founded fears arise that very often we are still far from this actualization and that at times the spirit of social and public life is painfully opposed to the declared "letter" of human rights. This state of things, which is burdensome for the societies concerned, would place special responsibility towards these societies and the history of man on those contributing to its establishment.

The essential sense of the State, as a political community, consists in that the society and people composing it are master and sovereign of their own destiny. This sense remains unrealized if, instead of the exercise of power with the moral participation of the society or people, what we see is the imposition of power by a certain group upon all the other members of the society. This is essential in the present age, with its enormous increase in people's social awareness and the accompanying need for the citizens to have a right share in the political life of the community, while taking account of the real conditions of each people and the necessary vigor of public authority. These therefore are questions of primary importance from the point of view of the progress of man himself and the overall development of his humanity.

The Church has always taught the duty to act for the common good and, in so doing, has likewise educated good citizens for each State. Furthermore, she has always taught that the fundamental duty of power is solicitude for the common good of society; this is what gives power its fundamental rights. Precisely in the name of these premises of the objective ethical order, the rights of power can only be understood on the basis of respect for the objective and inviolable rights of man. The common good that authority in the State serves is brought to full realization only when all the citizens are sure of their rights. The lack of this leads to the dissolution of society, opposition by citizens to authority, or a situation of oppression, intimidation, violence, and terrorism, of which many examples have been provided by the totalitarianisms of this century. Thus the principle of human rights is of profound concern to the area of social justice and is the measure by which it can be tested in the life of political bodies.

These rights are rightly reckoned to include the right to religious freedom together with the right to freedom of conscience. The Second Vatican Council considered especially necessary the preparation of a fairly long declaration on this subject. This is the document called *Dignitatis Humanae*, in which is expressed not only the theological concept of the question but also the concept reached from the point of view of natural law, that is to say from the "purely human" position, on the basis of the premises given by man's own experience, his reason and his sense of human dignity. Certainly the curtailment of the religious freedom of individuals and communities is not only a painful experience but it is above all an attack on man's very dignity, independently of the religion professed or of the concept of the world which these individuals and communities have. The curtailment and violation of religious freedom are in contrast with man's dignity and his objective rights. The Council document mentioned above states clearly enough what that curtailment or violation of religious freedom is. In this case we are undoubtedly confronted with a radical injustice with regard to what is particularly deep within man, what is authentically human. Indeed, even the phenomenon of unbelief, a-religiousness and atheism, as a human phenomenon, is understood only in relation to the phenomenon of religion and faith. It is therefore difficult, even from a "purely human" point of view, to accept a position that gives only atheism the right of citizenship in public and social life, while believers are, as



though by principle, barely tolerated or are treated as second-class citizens or are even-and this has already happened-entirely deprived of the rights of citizenship.

Even if briefly, this subject must also be dealt with, because it too enters into the complex of man's situations in the present-day world and because it too gives evidence of the degree to which this situation is overburdened by prejudices and injustices of various kinds. If we refrain from entering into details in this field in which we would have a special right and duty to do so, it is above all because, together with all those who are suffering the torments of discrimination and persecution for the name of God, we are guided by faith in the redeeming power of the Cross of Christ. However, because of my office, I appeal in the name of all believers throughout the world to those on whom the organization of social and public life in some way depends, earnestly requesting them to respect the rights of religion and of the Church's activity. No privilege is asked for, but only respect for an elementary right. Actuation of this right is one of the fundamental tests of man's authentic progress in any regime, in any society, system or milieu.



Veritatis Splendor, 6-27

"TEACHER, WHAT GOOD MUST I DO...?" (Mt 19:16)
Christ and the answer to the question about morality

"Someone came to him..." (Mt 19:16)

6. *The dialogue of Jesus with the rich young man*, related in the nineteenth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel, can serve as a useful guide *for listening once more* in a lively and direct way to his moral teaching: "Then someone came to him and said, 'Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?' And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments. 'He said to him, 'Which ones?' And Jesus said, 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these; what do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me' " (Mt 19:16-21).

7. *"Then someone came to him..."* In the young man, whom Matthew's Gospel does not name, we can recognize every person who, consciously or not, *approaches Christ the Redeemer of man and questions him about morality*. For the young man, the *question* is not so much about rules to be followed, but *about the full meaning of life*. This is in fact the aspiration at the heart of every human decision and action, the quiet searching and interior prompting which sets freedom in motion. This question is ultimately an appeal to the absolute Good that attracts us and beckons us; it is the echo of a call from God who is the origin and goal of man's life. Precisely in this perspective the Second Vatican Council called for a renewal of moral theology, so that its teaching would display the lofty vocation which the faithful have received in Christ, the only response fully capable of satisfying the desire of the human heart.

In order to make this "encounter" with Christ possible, God willed his Church. Indeed, the Church "wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life."

"Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt 19:16)

8. The question that the rich young man puts to Jesus of Nazareth is one that rises from the depths of his heart. It is *an essential and unavoidable question for the life of every man*, for it is about the moral good that must be done, and about eternal life. The young man senses that there is a connection between moral good and the fulfillment of his own destiny. He is a devout Israelite, raised as it were in the shadow of the Law of the Lord. If he asks Jesus this question, we can presume that it is not because he is ignorant of the answer contained in the Law. It is more likely that the attractiveness of the person of Jesus had prompted within him new questions about moral good. He feels the need to draw near to the One who had begun his preaching with this new and decisive proclamation: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15).

People today need to turn to Christ once again in order to receive from him the answer to their questions about what is good and what is evil. Christ is the Teacher, the Risen One who has life in himself and who is always present in his Church and in the world. It is he who opens up to the faithful the book



of the Scriptures and, by fully revealing the Father's will, teaches the truth about moral action. At the source and summit of the economy of salvation, as the Alpha and the Omega of human history (cf. *Rev* 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), Christ sheds light on man's condition and his integral vocation. Consequently, "the man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly — and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being — must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter him with all his own self; he must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deeper wonder at himself."

If we therefore wish to go to the heart of the Gospel's moral teaching and grasp its profound and unchanging content, we must carefully inquire into the meaning of the question asked by the rich young man in the Gospel and, even more, the meaning of Jesus' reply, allowing ourselves to be guided by him. Jesus, as a patient and sensitive teacher, answers the young man by taking him, as it were, by the hand, and leading him step by step to the full truth.

"There is only one who is good" (Mt 19:17)

9. Jesus says: "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (*Mt* 19:17). In the versions of the Evangelists Mark and Luke the question is phrased in this way: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (*Mk* 10:18; cf. *Lk* 18:19).

Before answering the question, Jesus wishes the young man to have a clear idea of why he asked his question. The "Good Teacher" points out to him — and to all of us — that the answer to the question, "What good must I do to have eternal life?" can only be found by turning one's mind and heart to the "One" who is good: "No one is good but God alone" (*Mk* 10:18; cf. *Lk* 18:19). *Only God can answer the question about what is good, because he is the Good itself.*

To ask about the good, in fact, ultimately means to turn towards God, the fullness of goodness. Jesus shows that the young man's question is really a *religious question*, and that the goodness that attracts and at the same time obliges man has its source in God, and indeed is God himself. God alone is worthy of being loved "with all one's heart, and with all one's soul, and with all one's mind" (*Mt* 22:37). He is the source of man's happiness. Jesus brings the question about morally good action back to its religious foundations, to the acknowledgment of God, who alone is goodness, fullness of life, the final end of human activity, and perfect happiness.

10. The Church, instructed by the Teacher's words, believes that man, made in the image of the Creator, redeemed by the Blood of Christ and made holy by the presence of the Holy Spirit, has as the *ultimate purpose of his life to live "for the praise of God's glory"* (cf. *Eph* 1:12), striving to make each of his actions reflect the splendor of that glory. "Know, then, O beautiful soul, that you are *the image of God,*" writes Saint Ambrose. "Know that you are *the glory of God* (1 *Cor* 11:7). Hear how you are his glory. The Prophet says: *Your knowledge has become too wonderful for me* (cf. *Ps.* 138:6, Vulg.). That is to say, in my work your majesty has become more wonderful; in the counsels of men your wisdom is exalted. When I consider myself, such as I am known to you in my secret thoughts and deepest emotions, the mysteries of your knowledge are disclosed to me. Know then, O man, your greatness, and be vigilant."



What man is and what he must do becomes clear as soon as God reveals himself. The Decalogue is based on these words: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (*Ex* 20:2-3). In the "ten words" of the Covenant with Israel, and in the whole Law, God makes himself known and acknowledged as the One who "alone is good"; the One who despite man's sin remains the "model" for moral action, in accordance with his command, "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (*Lev* 19:2); as the One who, faithful to his love for man, gives him his Law (cf. *Ex* 19:9-24 and 20:18-21) in order to restore man's original and peaceful harmony with the Creator and with all creation, and, what is more, to draw him into his divine love: "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (*Lev* 26:12).

The moral life presents itself as the response due to the many gratuitous initiatives taken by God out of love for man. It is a response of love, according to the statement made in Deuteronomy about the fundamental commandment: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children" (*Dt* 6:4-7). Thus the moral life, caught up in the gratuitousness of God's love, is called to reflect his glory: "For the one who loves God it is enough to be pleasing to the One whom he loves: for no greater reward should be sought than that love itself; charity in fact is of God in such a way that God himself is charity."

11. The statement that "There is only one who is good" thus brings us back to the "first tablet" of the commandments, which calls us to acknowledge God as the one Lord of all and to worship him alone for his infinite holiness (cf. *Ex* 20:2-11). *The good is belonging to God, obeying him*, walking humbly with him in doing justice and in loving kindness (cf. *Mic* 6:8). *Acknowledging the Lord as God is the very core, the heart of the Law*, from which the particular precepts flow and towards which they are ordered. In the morality of the commandments the fact that the people of Israel belongs to the Lord is made evident, because God alone is the One who is good. Such is the witness of Sacred Scripture, imbued in every one of its pages with a lively perception of God's absolute holiness: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" (*Is* 6:3).

But if God alone is the Good, no human effort, not even the most rigorous observance of the commandments, succeeds in "fulfilling" the Law, that is, acknowledging the Lord as God and rendering him the worship due to him alone (cf. *Mt* 4:10). *This "fulfillment" can come only from a gift of God*: the offer of a share in the divine Goodness revealed and communicated in Jesus, the one whom the rich young man addresses with the words "Good Teacher" (*Mk* 10:17; *Lk* 18:18). What the young man now perhaps only dimly perceives will in the end be fully revealed by Jesus himself in the invitation: "Come, follow me" (*Mt* 19:21).

"If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:17)

12. Only God can answer the question about the good, because he is the Good. But God has already given an answer to this question: he did so *by creating man and ordering him* with wisdom and love to his final end, through the law which is inscribed in his heart (cf. *Rom* 2:15), the "natural law." The latter "is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided. God gave this light and this law to man at creation." He also did so *in the history of Israel*, particularly in the "ten words," the *commandments of Sinai*, whereby he brought into existence the people of the Covenant (cf. *Ex* 24) and called them to



be his "own possession among all peoples," "a holy nation" (*Ex* 19:5-6), which would radiate his holiness to all peoples (cf. *Wis* 18:4; *Ez* 20:41). The gift of the Decalogue was a promise and sign of the *New Covenant*, in which the law would be written in a new and definitive way upon the human heart (cf. *Jer* 31:31-34), replacing the law of sin which had disfigured that heart (cf. *Jer* 17:1). In those days, "a new heart" would be given, for in it would dwell "a new spirit," the Spirit of God (cf. *Ez* 36:24-28).

Consequently, after making the important clarification: "There is only one who is good," Jesus tells the young man: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (*Mt* 19:17). In this way, a close connection is made *between eternal life and obedience to God's commandments*: God's commandments show man the path of life and they lead to it. From the very lips of Jesus, the new Moses, man is once again given the commandments of the Decalogue. Jesus himself definitively confirms them and proposes them to us as the way and condition of salvation. *The commandments are linked to a promise*. In the Old Covenant the object of the promise was the possession of a land where the people would be able to live in freedom and in accordance with righteousness (cf. *Dt* 6:20-25). In the New Covenant the object of the promise is the "Kingdom of Heaven," as Jesus declares at the beginning of the "Sermon on the Mount" — a sermon that contains the fullest and most complete formulation of the New Law (cf. *Mt* 5-7), clearly linked to the Decalogue entrusted by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. This same reality of the Kingdom is referred to in the expression "eternal life," which is a participation in the very life of God. It is attained in its perfection only after death, but in faith it is even now a light of truth, a source of meaning for life, an inchoate share in the full following of Christ. Indeed, Jesus says to his disciples after speaking to the rich young man: "Every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life" (*Mt* 19:29).

13. Jesus' answer is not enough for the young man, who continues by asking the Teacher about the commandments that must be kept: "He said to him, 'Which ones?'" (*Mt* 19:18). He asks what he must do in life in order to show that he acknowledges God's holiness. After directing the young man's gaze towards God, Jesus reminds him of the commandments of the Decalogue regarding one's neighbor: "Jesus said: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (*Mt* 19:18-19).

From the context of the conversation, and especially from a comparison of Matthew's text with the parallel passages in Mark and Luke, it is clear that Jesus does not intend to list each and every one of the commandments required in order to "enter into life," but rather wishes to draw the young man's attention to the "*centrality*" of the Decalogue with regard to every other precept, inasmuch as it is the interpretation of what the words "I am the Lord your God" mean for man. Nevertheless we cannot fail to notice which commandments of the Law the Lord recalls to the young man. They are some of the commandments belonging to the so-called "second tablet" of the Decalogue, the summary (cf. *Rom* 13: 8-10) and foundation of which is *the commandment of love of neighbor*: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (*Mt* 19:19; cf. *Mk* 12:31). In this commandment we find a precise expression of *the singular dignity of the human person*, "the only creature that God has wanted for its own sake." The different commandments of the Decalogue are really only so many reflections of the one commandment about the good of the person, at the level of the many different goods which characterize his identity as a spiritual and bodily being in relationship with God, with his neighbor



and with the material world. As we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "the Ten Commandments are part of God's Revelation. At the same time, they teach us man's true humanity. They shed light on the essential duties, and so indirectly on the fundamental rights, inherent in the nature of the human person."

The commandments of which Jesus reminds the young man are meant to safeguard *the good* of the person, the image of God, by protecting his *goods*. "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness" are moral rules formulated in terms of prohibitions. These negative precepts express with particular force the ever urgent need to protect human life, the communion of persons in marriage, private property, truthfulness and people's good name.

The commandments thus represent the basic condition for love of neighbor; at the same time they are the proof of that love. They are the *first necessary step on the journey towards freedom*, its starting-point. "The beginning of freedom," Saint Augustine writes, "is to be free from crimes... such as murder, adultery, fornication, theft, fraud, sacrilege and so forth. When once one is without these crimes (and every Christian should be without them), one begins to lift up one's head towards freedom. But this is only the beginning of freedom, not perfect freedom...."

14. This certainly does not mean that Christ wishes to put the love of neighbor higher than, or even to set it apart from, the love of God. This is evident from his conversation with the teacher of the Law, who asked him a question very much like the one asked by the young man. Jesus refers him to *the two commandments of love of God and love of neighbor* (cf. *Lk* 10:25-27), and reminds him that only by observing them will he have eternal life: "Do this, and you will live" (*Lk* 10:28). Nonetheless it is significant that it is precisely the second of these commandments that arouses the curiosity of the teacher of the Law, who asks him: "And who is my neighbor?" (*Lk* 10:29). The Teacher replies with the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is critical for fully understanding the commandment of love of neighbor (cf. *Lk* 10:30-37).

These two commandments, on which "depend all the Law and the Prophets" (*Mt* 22:40), are profoundly connected and mutually related. *Their inseparable unity* is attested to by Christ in his words and by his very life: his mission culminates in the Cross of our Redemption (cf. *Jn* 3:14-15), the sign of his indivisible love for the Father and for humanity (cf. *Jn* 13:1).

Both the Old and the New Testaments explicitly affirm that *without love of neighbor, made concrete in keeping the commandments, genuine love for God is not possible*. Saint John makes the point with extraordinary forcefulness: "If anyone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (*Jn* 4:20). The Evangelist echoes the moral preaching of Christ, expressed in a wonderful and unambiguous way in the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10:30-37) and in his words about the final judgment (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46).

15. In the "Sermon on the Mount," the *magna charta* of Gospel morality, Jesus says: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them" (*Mt* 5:17). Christ is the key to the Scriptures: "You search the Scriptures...; and it is they that bear witness to me" (*Jn* 5:39). Christ is the center of the economy of salvation, the recapitulation of the Old and New Testaments, of the promises of the Law and of their fulfillment in the Gospel; he is the living and eternal link between the Old and the New Covenants. Commenting on Paul's statement that "Christ is the end of the law" (*Rom* 10:4), Saint Ambrose writes: "end not in the sense of a



deficiency, but in the sense of the fullness of the Law: a fullness which is achieved in Christ (*plenitudo legis in Christo est*), since he came not to abolish the Law but to bring it to fulfillment. In the same way that there is an Old Testament, but all truth is in the New Testament, so it is for the Law: what was given through Moses is a figure of the true law. Therefore, the Mosaic Law is an image of the truth.”

Jesus brings God's commandments to fulfillment, particularly the commandment of love of neighbor, *by interiorizing their demands and by bringing out their fullest meaning*. Love of neighbor springs from a *loving heart* that, precisely because it loves, is ready to live out *the loftiest challenges*. Jesus shows that the commandments must not be understood as a minimum limit not to be gone beyond, but rather as a path involving a moral and spiritual journey towards perfection, at the heart of which is love (cf. *Col 3:14*). Thus the commandment "You shall not murder" becomes a call to an attentive love that protects and promotes the life of one's neighbor. The precept prohibiting adultery becomes an invitation to a pure way of looking at others, capable of respecting the spousal meaning of the body: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' *But I say to you* that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' *But I say to you* that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (*Mt 5:21-22, 27-28*). *Jesus himself is the living "fulfillment" of the Law* inasmuch as he fulfills its authentic meaning by the total gift of himself: *he himself becomes a living and personal Law*, who invites people to follow him; through the Spirit, he gives the grace to share his own life and love and provides the strength to bear witness to that love in personal choices and actions (cf. *Jn 13:34-35*).

"If you wish to be perfect" (Mt 19:21)

16. The answer he receives about the commandments does not satisfy the young man, who asks Jesus a further question. "I have kept all these; *what do I still lack?* " (*Mt 19:20*). It is not easy to say with a clear conscience "I have kept all these," if one has any understanding of the real meaning of the demands contained in God's Law. And yet, even though he is able to make this reply, even though he has followed the moral ideal seriously and generously from childhood, the rich young man knows that he is still far from the goal: before the person of Jesus he realizes that he is still lacking something. It is his awareness of this insufficiency that Jesus addresses in his final answer. Conscious of *the young man's yearning for something greater, which would transcend a legalistic interpretation of the commandments*, the Good Teacher invites him to enter upon the path of perfection: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (*Mt 19:21*).

Like the earlier part of Jesus' answer, this part too must be read and interpreted in the context of the whole moral message of the Gospel, and in particular in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes (cf. *Mt 5:3-12*), the first of which is precisely the Beatitude of the poor, the "poor in spirit" as Saint Matthew makes clear (*Mt 5:3*), the humble. In this sense it can be said that the Beatitudes are also relevant to the answer given by Jesus to the young man's question: "What good must I do to have eternal life? ." Indeed, each of the Beatitudes promises, from a particular viewpoint, that very "good" which opens man up to eternal life, and indeed is eternal life.

The Beatitudes are not specifically concerned with certain particular rules of behavior. Rather, they speak of basic attitudes and dispositions in life and therefore they *do not coincide exactly with the commandments*. On the other hand, *there is no separation or opposition* between the Beatitudes and the



commandments: both refer to the good, to eternal life. The Sermon on the Mount begins with the proclamation of the Beatitudes, but also refers to the commandments (cf. *Mt* 5:20-48). At the same time, the Sermon on the Mount demonstrates the openness of the commandments and their orientation towards the horizon of the perfection proper to the Beatitudes. These latter are above all *promises*, from which there also indirectly flow *normative indications* for the moral life. In their originality and profundity they are a sort of *self-portrait of Christ*, and for this very reason are *invitations to discipleship and to communion of life with Christ*.

17. We do not know how clearly the young man in the Gospel understood the profound and challenging import of Jesus' first reply: "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." But it is certain that the young man's commitment to respect all the moral demands of the commandments represents the absolutely essential ground in which the desire for perfection can take root and mature, the desire, that is, for the meaning of the commandments to be completely fulfilled in following Christ. Jesus' conversation with the young man helps us to grasp *the conditions for the moral growth of man, who has been called to perfection*: the young man, having observed all the commandments, shows that he is incapable of taking the next step by himself alone. To do so requires mature human freedom ("If you wish to be perfect") and God's gift of grace ("Come, follow me").

Perfection demands that maturity in self-giving to which human freedom is called. Jesus points out to the young man that the commandments are the first and indispensable condition for having eternal life; on the other hand, for the young man to give up all he possesses and to follow the Lord is presented as an invitation: "If you wish..." These words of Jesus reveal the particular dynamic of freedom's growth towards maturity, and at the same time *they bear witness to the fundamental relationship between freedom and divine law*. Human freedom and God's law are not in opposition; on the contrary, they appeal one to the other. The follower of Christ knows that his vocation is to freedom. "You were called to freedom, brethren" (*Gal* 5:13), proclaims the Apostle Paul with joy and pride. But he immediately adds: "only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" (*ibid.*). The firmness with which the Apostle opposes those who believe that they are justified by the Law has nothing to do with man's "liberation" from precepts. On the contrary, the latter are at the service of the practice of love: "For he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the Law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (*Rom* 13:8-9). Saint Augustine, after speaking of the observance of the commandments as being a kind of incipient, imperfect freedom, goes on to say: "Why, someone will ask, is it not yet perfect? Because 'I see in my members another law at war with the law of my reason.' In part freedom, in part slavery: not yet complete freedom, not yet pure, not yet whole, because we are not yet in eternity. In part we retain our weakness and in part we have attained freedom. All our sins were destroyed in Baptism, but does it follow that no weakness remained after iniquity was destroyed? Had none remained, we would live without sin in this life. But who would dare to say this except someone who is proud, someone unworthy of the mercy of our deliverer?... Therefore, since some weakness has remained in us, I dare to say that to the extent to which we serve God we are free, while to the extent that we follow the law of sin, we are still slaves."

18. Those who live "by the flesh" experience God's law as a burden, and indeed as a denial or at least a restriction of their own freedom. On the other hand, those who are impelled by love and "walk by the Spirit" (*Gal* 5:16), and who desire to serve others, find in God's Law the fundamental and



necessary way in which to practice love as something freely chosen and freely lived out. Indeed, they feel an interior urge — a genuine "necessity" and no longer a form of coercion — not to stop at the minimum demands of the Law, but to live them in their "fullness." This is a still uncertain and fragile journey as long as we are on earth, but it is one made possible by grace, which enables us to possess the full freedom of the children of God (cf. *Rom* 8:21) and thus to live our moral life in a way worthy of our sublime vocation as "sons in the Son."

This vocation to perfect love is not restricted to a small group of individuals. *The invitation*, "go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor," and the promise "you will have treasure in heaven," are meant for everyone, because they bring out the full meaning of the commandment of love for neighbor, just as the invitation which follows, "Come, follow me," is the new, specific form of the commandment of love of God. Both the commandments and Jesus' invitation to the rich young man stand at the service of a single and indivisible charity, which spontaneously tends towards that perfection whose measure is God alone: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Mt* 5:48). In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus makes even clearer the meaning of this perfection: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (*Lk* 6:36).

"Come, follow me" (*Mt* 19:21)

19. The way and at the same time the content of this perfection consist in the following of Jesus, *sequela Christi*, once one has given up one's own wealth and very self. This is precisely the conclusion of Jesus' conversation with the young man: "Come, follow me" (*Mt* 19:21). It is an invitation the marvelous grandeur of which will be fully perceived by the disciples after Christ's Resurrection, when the Holy Spirit leads them to all truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13).

It is Jesus himself who takes the initiative and calls people to follow him. His call is addressed first to those to whom he entrusts a particular mission, beginning with the Twelve; but it is also clear that every believer is called to be a follower of Christ (cf. *Acts* 6:1). *Following Christ is thus the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality*: just as the people of Israel followed God who led them through the desert towards the Promised Land (cf. *Ex* 13:21), so every disciple must follow Jesus, towards whom he is drawn by the Father himself (cf. *Jn* 6:44).

This is not a matter only of disposing oneself to hear a teaching and obediently accepting a commandment. More radically, it involves *holding fast to the very person of Jesus*, partaking of his life and his destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father. By responding in faith and following the one who is Incarnate Wisdom, the disciple of Jesus truly becomes *a disciple of God* (cf. *Jn* 6:45). Jesus is indeed the light of the world, the light of life (cf. *Jn* 8:12). He is the shepherd who leads his sheep and feeds them (cf. *Jn* 10:11-16); he is the way, and the truth, and the life (cf. *Jn* 14:6). It is Jesus who leads to the Father, so much so that to see him, the Son, is to see the Father (cf. *Jn* 14:6-10). And thus to imitate the Son, "the image of the invisible God" (*Col* 1:15), means to imitate the Father.

20. *Jesus asks us to follow him and to imitate him along the path of love, a love which gives itself completely to the brethren out of love for God*: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (*Jn* 15:12). The word "as" requires imitation of Jesus and of his love, of which the washing of feet is a sign: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (*Jn* 13:14-15). Jesus' way of acting and his words, his deeds and his precepts constitute the moral rule



of Christian life. Indeed, his actions, and in particular his Passion and Death on the Cross, are the living revelation of his love for the Father and for others. This is exactly the love that Jesus wishes to be imitated by all who follow him. It is *the "new" commandment*: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (*Jn 13:34-35*).

The word "as" also indicates the *degree* of Jesus' love, and of the love with which his disciples are called to love one another. After saying: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (*Jn 15:12*), Jesus continues with words which indicate the sacrificial gift of his life on the Cross, as the witness to a love "to the end" (*Jn 13:1*): "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (*Jn 15:13*).

As he calls the young man to follow him along the way of perfection, Jesus asks him to be perfect in the command of love, in "his" commandment: to become part of the unfolding of his complete giving, to imitate and rekindle the very love of the "Good" Teacher, the one who loved "to the end." This is what Jesus asks of everyone who wishes to follow him: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (*Mt 16:24*).

21. *Following Christ* is not an outward imitation, since it touches man at the very depths of his being. Being a follower of Christ means *becoming conformed to him* who became a servant even to giving himself on the Cross (cf. *Phil 2:5-8*). Christ dwells by faith in the heart of the believer (cf. *Eph 3:17*), and thus the disciple is conformed to the Lord. This is the *effect of grace*, of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

Having become one with Christ, the Christian *becomes a member of his Body, which is the Church* (cf. *Cor 12:13, 27*). By the work of the Spirit, Baptism radically configures the faithful to Christ in the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection; it "clothes him" in Christ (cf. *Gal 3:27*): "Let us rejoice and give thanks," exclaims Saint Augustine speaking to the baptized, "for we have become not only Christians, but Christ (...). Marvel and rejoice: we have become Christ!." Having died to sin, those who are baptized receive new life (cf. *Rom 6:3-11*): alive for God in Christ Jesus, they are called to walk by the Spirit and to manifest the Spirit's fruits in their lives (cf. *Gal 5:16-25*). Sharing in the *Eucharist*, the sacrament of the New Covenant (cf. *1 Cor 11:23-29*), is the culmination of our assimilation to Christ, the source of "eternal life" (cf. *Jn 6:51-58*), the source and power of that complete gift of self, which Jesus — according to the testimony handed on by Paul — commands us to commemorate in liturgy and in life: "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (*1 Cor 11:26*).

"With God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26)

22. The conclusion of Jesus' conversation with the rich young man is very poignant: "When the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful, for he had many possessions" (*Mt 19:22*). Not only the rich man but the disciples themselves are taken aback by Jesus' call to discipleship, the demands of which transcend human aspirations and abilities: "When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, "Then who can be saved?" " (*Mt 19:25*). *But the Master refers them to God's power*: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (*Mt 19:26*).

In the same chapter of Matthew's Gospel (19:3-10), Jesus, interpreting the Mosaic Law on marriage, rejects the right to divorce, appealing to a "beginning" more fundamental and more authoritative than the Law of Moses: God's original plan for mankind, a plan which man after sin has



no longer been able to live up to: "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (*Mt* 19:8). Jesus' appeal to the "beginning" dismays the disciples, who remark: "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry" (*Mt* 19:10). And Jesus, referring specifically to the charism of celibacy "for the Kingdom of Heaven" (*Mt* 19:12), but stating a general rule, indicates the new and surprising possibility opened up to man by God's grace. "He said to them: 'Not everyone can accept this saying, but only those to whom it is given' " (*Mt* 19:11).

To imitate and live out the love of Christ is not possible for man by his own strength alone. He becomes *capable of this love only by virtue of a gift received*. As the Lord Jesus receives the love of his Father, so he in turn freely communicates that love to his disciples: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love" (*Jn* 15:9). *Christ's gift is his Spirit*, whose first "fruit" (cf. *Gal* 5:22) is charity: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (*Rom* 5:5). Saint Augustine asks: "Does love bring about the keeping of the commandments, or does the keeping of the commandments bring about love?" And he answers: "But who can doubt that love comes first? For the one who does not love has no reason for keeping the commandments."

23. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (*Rom* 8:2). With these words the Apostle Paul invites us to consider in the perspective of the history of salvation, which reaches its fulfillment in Christ, *the relationship between the (Old) Law and grace* (the New Law). He recognizes the pedagogic function of the Law, which, by enabling sinful man to take stock of his own powerlessness and by stripping him of the presumption of his self-sufficiency, leads him to ask for and to receive "life in the Spirit." Only in this new life is it possible to carry out God's commandments. Indeed, it is through faith in Christ that we have been made righteous (cf. *Rom* 3:28): the "righteousness" which the Law demands, but is unable to give, is found by every believer to be revealed and granted by the Lord Jesus. Once again it is Saint Augustine who admirably sums up this Pauline dialectic of law and grace: "The law was given that grace might be sought; and grace was given, that the law might be fulfilled."

Love and life according to the Gospel cannot be thought of first and foremost as a kind of precept, because what they demand is beyond man's abilities. They are possible only as the result of a gift of God who heals, restores and transforms the human heart by his grace: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (*Jn* 1:17). The promise of eternal life is thus linked to the gift of grace, and the gift of the Spirit that we have received is even now the "guarantee of our inheritance" (*Eph* 1:14).

24. And so we find revealed the authentic and original aspect of the commandment of love and of the perfection to which it is ordered: we are speaking of a *possibility opened up to man exclusively by grace*, by the gift of God, by his love. On the other hand, precisely the awareness of having received the gift, of possessing in Jesus Christ the love of God, generates and sustains *the free response* of a full love for God and the brethren, as the Apostle John insistently reminds us in his first Letter: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love... Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another... We love, because he first loved us" (1 *Jn* 4:7-8, 11, 19).

This inseparable connection between the Lord's grace and human freedom, between gift and task, has been expressed in simple yet profound words by Saint Augustine in his prayer: "*Da quod iubes et iube quod vis*" (grant what you command and command what you will).



The gift does not lessen but reinforces the moral demands of love: "This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another just as he has commanded us" (1 Jn 3:32). One can "abide" in love only by keeping the commandments, as Jesus states: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (Jn 15:10).

Going to the heart of the moral message of Jesus and the preaching of the Apostles, and summing up in a remarkable way the great tradition of the Fathers of the East and West, and of Saint Augustine in particular, Saint Thomas was able to write that *the New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit given through faith in Christ*. The external precepts also mentioned in the Gospel dispose one for this grace or produce its effects in one's life. Indeed, the New Law is not content to say what must be done, but also gives the power to "do what is true" (cf. Jn 3:21). Saint John Chrysostom likewise observed that the New Law was promulgated at the descent of the Holy Spirit from heaven on the day of Pentecost, and that the Apostles "did not come down from the mountain carrying, like Moses, tablets of stone in their hands; but they came down carrying the Holy Spirit in their hearts... having become by his grace a living law, a living book."

"Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20)

25. Jesus' conversation with the rich young man continues, in a sense, *in every period of history, including our own*. The question: "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" arises in the heart of every individual, and it is Christ alone who is capable of giving the full and definitive answer. The Teacher who expounds God's commandments, who invites others to follow him and gives the grace for a new life, is always present and at work in our midst, as he himself promised: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). *Christ's relevance for people of all times is shown forth in his body, which is the Church*. For this reason the Lord promised his disciples the Holy Spirit, who would "bring to their remembrance" and teach them to understand his commandments (cf. Jn 14:26), and who would be the principle and constant source of a new life in the world (cf. Jn 3:5-8; Rom 8:1-13).

The moral prescriptions which God imparted in the Old Covenant, and which attained their perfection in the New and Eternal Covenant in the very person of the Son of God made man, must be *faithfully kept and continually put into practice* in the various different cultures throughout the course of history. The task of interpreting these prescriptions was entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and to their successors, with the special assistance of the Spirit of truth: "He who hears you hears me" (Lk 10:16). By the light and the strength of this Spirit the Apostles carried out their mission of preaching the Gospel and of pointing out the "way" of the Lord (cf. Acts 18:25), teaching above all how to follow and imitate Christ: "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21).

26. In the *moral catechesis of the Apostles*, besides exhortations and directions connected to specific historical and cultural situations, we find an ethical teaching with precise rules of behavior. This is seen in their Letters, which contain the interpretation, made under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, of the Lord's precepts as they are to be lived in different cultural circumstances (cf. Rom 12-15; 1 Cor 11-14; Gal 5-6; Eph 4-6; Col 3-4; 1 Pt and Jas). From the Church's beginnings, the Apostles, by virtue of their pastoral responsibility to preach the Gospel, *were vigilant over the right conduct of Christians*, just as they were vigilant for the purity of the faith and the handing down of the divine gifts in the sacraments. The first Christians, coming both from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, differed



from the pagans not only in their faith and their liturgy but also in the witness of their moral conduct, which was inspired by the New Law. The Church is in fact a communion both of faith and of life; her rule of life is "faith working through love" (*Gal 5:6*).

No damage must be done to the *harmony between faith and life: the unity of the Church* is damaged not only by Christians who reject or distort the truths of faith but also by those who disregard the moral obligations to which they are called by the Gospel (cf. *1 Cor 5:9-13*). The Apostles decisively rejected any separation between the commitment of the heart and the actions that express or prove it (cf. *1 Jn 2:3-6*). And ever since Apostolic times the Church's Pastors have unambiguously condemned the behavior of those who fostered division by their teaching or by their actions.

27. Within the unity of the Church, promoting and preserving the faith and the moral life is the task entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles (cf. *Mt 28:19-20*), a task which continues in the ministry of their successors. This is apparent from the *living Tradition*, whereby — as the Second Vatican Council teaches — "the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to every generation all that she is and all that she believes. This Tradition which comes from the Apostles, progresses in the Church under the assistance of the Holy Spirit." In the Holy Spirit, the Church receives and hands down the Scripture as the witness to the "great things" which God has done in history (cf. *Lk 1:49*); she professes by the lips of her Fathers and Doctors the truth of the Word made flesh, puts his precepts and love into practice in the lives of her Saints and in the sacrifice of her Martyrs, and celebrates her hope in him in the Liturgy. By this same Tradition Christians receive "the living voice of the Gospel," as the faithful expression of God's wisdom and will.

Within Tradition, *the authentic interpretation* of the Lord's law develops, with the help of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who is at the origin of the Revelation of Jesus' commandments and teachings guarantees that they will be reverently preserved, faithfully expounded and correctly applied in different times and places. This constant "putting into practice" of the commandments is the sign and fruit of a deeper insight into Revelation and of an understanding in the light of faith of new historical and cultural situations. Nevertheless, it can only confirm the permanent validity of Revelation and follow in the line of the interpretation given to it by the great Tradition of the Church's teaching and life, as witnessed by the teaching of the Fathers, the lives of the Saints, the Church's Liturgy and the teaching of the Magisterium.

In particular, as the Council affirms, *"the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether in its written form or in that of Tradition, has been entrusted only to those charged with the Church's living Magisterium, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ."* The Church, in her life and teaching, is thus revealed as "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (*1 Tim 3:15*), including the truth regarding moral action. Indeed, "the Church has the right always and everywhere to proclaim moral principles, even in respect of the social order, and to make judgments about any human matter in so far as this is required by fundamental human rights or the salvation of souls."

Precisely on the questions frequently debated in moral theology today and with regard to which new tendencies and theories have developed, the Magisterium, in fidelity to Jesus Christ and in continuity with the Church's tradition, senses more urgently the duty to offer its own discernment and teaching, in order to help man in his journey towards truth and freedom.



Laborem Exercens, 4-10, 24-27

II. WORK AND MAN

4. *In the Book of Genesis*

The Church is convinced that work is a fundamental dimension of man's existence on earth. She is confirmed in this conviction by considering the whole heritage of the many sciences devoted to man: anthropology, paleontology, history, sociology, psychology and so on; they all seem to bear witness to this reality in an irrefutable way. But the source of the Church's conviction is above all the revealed word of God, and therefore what is *a conviction of the intellect* is also *a conviction of faith*. The reason is that the Church—and it is worthwhile stating it at this point—believes in man: she *thinks of man* and addresses herself to him *not only* in the light of historical experience, not only with the aid of the many methods of scientific knowledge, but in the first place in the light of the revealed word of the living God. Relating herself to man, she seeks *to express* the eternal *designs* and transcendent *destiny* which *the living God*, the Creator and Redeemer, has linked with him.

The Church finds *in the very first pages of the Book of Genesis* the source of her conviction that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth. An analysis of these texts makes us aware that they express—sometimes in an archaic way of manifesting thought—the fundamental truths about man, in the context of the mystery of creation itself. These truths are decisive for man from the very beginning, and at the same time they trace out the main lines of his earthly existence, both in the state of original justice and also after the breaking, caused by sin, of the Creator's original covenant with creation in man. When man, who had been created "in the image of God... male and female," hears the words: "Be fruitful and *multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it*," even though these words do not refer directly and explicitly to work, beyond any doubt they indirectly indicate it as an activity for man to carry out in the world. Indeed, they show its very deepest essence. Man is the image of God partly through the mandate received from his Creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth. In carrying out this mandate, man, every human being, reflects the very action of the Creator of the universe.

Work understood as a "transitive" activity, that is to say an activity beginning in the human subject and directed towards an external object, presupposes a specific dominion by man over "the earth," and in its turn it confirms and develops this dominion. It is clear that the term "the earth" of which the biblical text speaks is to be understood in the first place as that fragment of the visible universe that man inhabits. By extension, however, it can be understood as the whole of the visible world insofar as it comes within the range of man's influence and of his striving to satisfy his needs. The expression "subdue the earth" has an immense range. It means all the resources that the earth (and indirectly the visible world) contains and which, through the conscious activity of man, can be discovered and used for his ends. And so these words, placed at the beginning of the Bible, *never cease to be relevant*. They embrace equally the past ages of civilization and economy, as also the whole of modern reality and future phases of development, which are perhaps already to some extent beginning to take shape, though for the most part they are still almost unknown to man and hidden from him.

While people sometimes speak of periods of "acceleration" in the economic life and civilization of humanity or of individual nations, linking these periods to the progress of science and technology and especially to discoveries which are decisive for social and economic life, at the same time it can be said that none of these phenomena of "acceleration" exceeds the essential content of what was said in that most ancient of biblical texts. As man, through his work, becomes more and more the master of the



earth, and as he confirms his dominion over the visible world, again through his work, he nevertheless remains in every case and at every phase of this process within the Creator's original ordering. And this ordering remains necessarily and indissolubly linked with the fact that man was created, as male and female, "in the image of God." This *process is*, at the same time, *universal*: it embraces all human beings, every generation, every phase of economic and cultural development, and *at the same time* it is a process that takes place *within each human being*, in each conscious human subject. Each and every individual is at the same time embraced by it. Each and every individual, to the proper extent and in an incalculable number of ways, takes part in the giant process whereby man "subdues the earth" through his work.

5. *Work in the Objective Sense: Technology*

This universality and, at the same time, this multiplicity of the process of "subduing the earth" throw light upon human work, because man's dominion over the earth is achieved in and by means of work. There thus emerges the meaning of *work in an objective sense*, which finds expression in the various epochs of culture and civilization. Man dominates the earth by the very fact of domesticating animals, rearing them and obtaining from them the food and clothing he needs, and by the fact of being able to extract various natural resources from the earth and the seas. But man "subdues the earth" much more when he begins to cultivate it and then to transform its products, adapting them to his own use. Thus agriculture constitutes through human work a primary field of economic activity and an indispensable factor of production. Industry in its turn will always consist in linking the earth's riches—whether nature's living resources, or the products of agriculture, or the mineral or chemical resources—with man's work, whether physical or intellectual. This is also in a sense true in the sphere of what are called service industries, and also in the sphere of research, pure or applied.

In industry and agriculture man's work has today in many cases ceased to be mainly manual, for the toil of human hands and muscles is aided by *more and more highly perfected machinery*. Not only in industry but also in agriculture we are witnessing the transformations made possible by the gradual development of science and technology. Historically speaking, this, taken as a whole, has caused great changes in civilization, from the beginning of the "industrial era" to the successive phases of development through new technologies, such as the electronics and the microprocessor technology in recent years.

While it may seem that in the industrial process it is the machine that "works" and man merely supervises it, making it function and keeping it going in various ways, it is also true that for this very reason industrial development provides grounds for repurposing in new ways the question of human work. Both the original industrialization that gave rise to what is called the worker question and the subsequent industrial and post-industrial changes show in an eloquent manner that, even in the age of ever more mechanized "work," *the proper subject of work continues to be man*.

The development of industry and of the various sectors connected with it, even the most modern electronics technology, especially in the fields of miniaturization, communications and telecommunications and so forth, shows how vast is the role of technology, that ally of work that human thought has produced, in the interaction between the subject and object of work (in the widest sense of the word). Understood in this case not as a capacity or aptitude for work, but rather as a *whole set of instruments* which man uses in his work, technology is undoubtedly man's ally. It facilitates his work, perfects, accelerates and augments it. It leads to an increase in the quantity of things produced



by work, and in many cases improves their quality. However, it is also a fact that, in some instances, technology can cease to be man's ally and become almost his enemy, as when the mechanization of work "supplants" him, taking away all personal satisfaction and the incentive to creativity and responsibility, when it deprives many workers of their previous employment, or when, through exalting the machine, it reduces man to the status of its slave.

If the biblical words "subdue the earth" addressed to man from the very beginning are understood in the context of the whole modern age, industrial and post-industrial, then they undoubtedly include also *a relationship with technology*, with the world of machinery which is the fruit of the work of the human intellect and a historical confirmation of man's dominion over nature.

The recent stage of human history, especially that of certain societies, brings a correct affirmation of technology as a basic coefficient of economic progress; but, at the same time, this affirmation has been accompanied by and continues to be accompanied by the raising of essential questions concerning human work in relationship to its subject, which is man. These questions are particularly charged with *content and tension of an ethical and an ethical and social character*. They therefore constitute a continual challenge for institutions of many kinds, for States and governments, for systems and international organizations; they also constitute a challenge for the Church.

6. Work in the Subjective Sense: Man as the Subject of Work

In order to continue our analysis of work, an analysis linked with the word of the Bible telling man that he is to subdue the earth, we must concentrate our attention on *work in the subjective sense*, much more than we did on the objective significance, barely touching upon the vast range of problems known intimately and in detail to scholars in various fields and also, according to their specializations, to those who work. If the words of the Book of Genesis to which we refer in this analysis of ours speak of work in the objective sense in an indirect way, they also speak only indirectly of the subject of work; but what they say is very eloquent and is full of great significance.

Man has to subdue the earth and dominate it, because as the "image of God" he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization. *As a person, man is therefore the subject of work*. As a person he works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfill the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity. The principal truths concerning this theme were recently recalled by the Second Vatican Council in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, especially in Chapter One, which is devoted to man's calling.

And so this "dominion" spoken of in the biblical text being meditated upon here refers not only to the objective dimension of work but at the same time introduces us to an understanding of its subjective dimension. Understood as a process whereby man and the human race subdue the earth, work corresponds to this basic biblical concept only when throughout the process man manifests himself and confirms himself *as the one who "dominates."* This dominion, in a certain sense, refers to the subjective dimension even more than to the objective one: this dimension conditions *the very ethical nature* of work. In fact there is no doubt that human work has an ethical value of its own, which clearly and directly remain linked to the fact that the one who carries it out is a person, a conscious and free subject, that is to say a subject that decides about himself.



This truth, which in a sense constitutes the fundamental and perennial heart of Christian teaching on human work, has had and continues to have primary significance for the formulation of the important social problems characterizing whole ages.

The ancient world introduced its own typical differentiation of people into classes according to the type of work done. Work that demanded from the worker the exercise of physical strength, the work of muscles and hands, was considered unworthy of free men, and was therefore given to slaves. By broadening certain aspects that already belonged to the Old Testament, Christianity brought about a fundamental change of ideas in this field, taking the whole content of the Gospel message as its point of departure, especially the fact that the one who, while *being God*, became like us in all things¹¹ devoted most of the years of his life on earth to *manual work* at the carpenter's bench. This circumstance constitutes in itself the most eloquent "Gospel of work," showing that the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person. The sources of the dignity of work are to be sought primarily in the subjective dimension, not in the objective one.

Such a concept practically does away with the very basis of the ancient differentiation of people into classes according to the kind of work done. This does not mean that, from the objective point of view, human work cannot and must not be rated and qualified in any way. It only means that *the primary basis of the value of work is man himself*, who is its subject. This leads immediately to a very important conclusion of an ethical nature: however true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is "for man" and not man "for work." Through this conclusion one rightly comes to recognize the pre-eminence of the subjective meaning of work over the objective one. Given this way of understanding things, and presupposing that different sorts of work that people do can have greater or lesser objective value, let us try nevertheless to show that each sort is judged above all by *the measure of the dignity* of the subject of work, that is to say the person, *the individual who carries it out*. On the other hand: independently of the work that every man does, and presupposing that this work constitutes a purpose-at times a very demanding one-of his activity, this purpose does not possess a definitive meaning in itself. In fact, in the final analysis it is always man who is *the purpose of the work*, whatever work it is that is done by man-even if the common scale of values rates it as the merest "service," as the most monotonous even the most alienating work.

7. A Threat to the Right Order of Values

It is precisely these fundamental affirmations about work that always emerged from the wealth of Christian truth, especially from the very message of the "Gospel of work," thus creating the basis for a new way of thinking, judging and acting. In the modern period, from the beginning of the industrial age, the Christian truth about work had to oppose the various trends of *materialistic and economic* thought.

For certain supporters of such ideas, work was understood and treated as a sort of "merchandise" that the worker-especially the industrial worker-sells to the employer, who at the same time is the possessor of the capital, that is to say, of all the working tools and means that make production possible. This way of looking at work was widespread especially in the first half of the nineteenth century. Since then, explicit expressions of this sort have almost disappeared, and have given way to more human ways of thinking about work and evaluating it. The interaction between the worker and the tools and means of production has given rise to the development of various forms of capitalism - parallel with



various forms of collectivism - into which other socioeconomic elements have entered as a consequence of new concrete circumstances, of the activity of workers' associations and public authorities, and of the emergence of large transnational enterprises. Nevertheless, the *danger* of treating work as a special kind of "merchandise," or as an impersonal "force" needed for production (the expression "workforce" is in fact in common use) *always exists*, especially when the whole way of looking at the question of economics is marked by the premises of materialistic economism.

A systematic opportunity for thinking and evaluating in this way, and in a certain sense a stimulus for doing so, is provided by the quickening process of the development of a one-sidedly materialistic civilization, which gives prime importance to the objective dimension of work, while the subjective dimension-everything in direct or indirect relationship with the subject of work-remains on a secondary level. In all cases of this sort, in every social situation of this type, there is a confusion or even a reversal of the order laid down from the beginning by the words of the Book of Genesis: *man is treated as an instrument of production*, whereas he-he alone, independently of the work he does-ought to be treated as the effective subject of work and its true maker and creator. Precisely this reversal of order, whatever the program or name under which it occurs, should rightly be called "capitalism"-in the sense more fully explained below. Everybody knows that capitalism has a definite historical meaning as a system, an economic and social system, opposed to "socialism" or "communism." But in the light of the analysis of the fundamental reality of the whole economic process-first and foremost of the production structure that work is-it should be recognized that the error of early capitalism can be repeated wherever man is in a way treated on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument and not in accordance with the true dignity of his work-that is to say, where he is not treated as subject and maker, and for this very reason as the true purpose of the whole process of production.

This explains why the analysis of human work in the light of the words concerning man's "dominion" over the earth goes to the very heart of the ethical and social question. This concept should also find *a central place* in the whole *sphere of social and economic policy*, both within individual countries and in the wider field of international and intercontinental relationships, particularly with reference to the tensions making themselves felt in the world not only between East and West but also between North and South. Both John XXIII in the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* and Paul VI in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* gave special attention to these dimensions of the modern ethical and social question.

8. Worker Solidarity

When dealing with human work in the fundamental dimension of its subject, that is to say, the human person doing the work, one must make at least a summary evaluation of developments during the ninety years since *Rerum Novarum* in relation to the subjective dimension of work. Although the subject of work is always the same, that is to say man, nevertheless wide-ranging changes take place in the objective aspect. While one can say that, by reason of its subject, *work is one single thing* (one and unrepeatable every time), yet when one takes into consideration its objective directions one is forced to admit that *there exist many works*, many different sorts of work. The development of human civilization brings continual enrichment in this field. But at the same time, one cannot fail to note that in the process of this development not only do new forms of work appear but also others disappear.



Even if one accepts that on the whole this is a normal phenomenon, it must still be seen whether certain ethically and socially dangerous irregularities creep in, and to what extent.

It was precisely one such *wide-ranging anomaly* that gave rise in the last century to what has been called "the worker question," sometimes described as "the proletariat question". This question and the problems connected with it gave rise to a just social reaction and caused the impetuous emergence of a great burst of solidarity between workers, first and foremost industrial workers. The call to solidarity and common action addressed to the workers-especially to those engaged in narrowly specialized, monotonous and depersonalized work in industrial plants, when the machine tends to dominate man - was important and eloquent from the point of view of social ethics. It was the reaction *against the degradation of man as the subject of work*, and against the unheard-of accompanying exploitation in the field of wages, working conditions and social security for the worker. This reaction united the working world in a community marked by great solidarity.

Following the lines laid down by the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and many later documents of the Church's Magisterium, it must be frankly recognized that the reaction against the system of injustice and harm that cried to heaven for vengeance and that weighed heavily upon workers in that period of rapid industrialization was justified *from the point of view of social morality*. This state of affairs was favored by the liberal socio-political system, which, in accordance with its "economistic" premises, strengthened and safeguarded economic initiative by the possessors of capital alone, but did not pay sufficient attention to the rights of the workers, on the grounds that human work is solely an instrument of production, and that capital is the basis, efficient factor and purpose of production.

From that time, worker solidarity, together with a clearer and more committed realization by others of workers' rights, has in many cases brought about profound changes. Various forms of neo-capitalism or collectivism have developed. Various new systems have been thought out. Workers can often share in running businesses and in controlling their productivity, and in fact do so. Through appropriate associations, they exercise influence over conditions of work and pay, and also over social legislation. But at the same time various ideological or power systems, and new relationships which have arisen at various levels of society, *have allowed flagrant injustices to persist or have created new ones*. On the world level, the development of civilization and of communications has made possible a more complete diagnosis of the living and working conditions of man globally, but it has also revealed other forms of injustice, much more extensive than those which in the last century stimulated unity between workers for particular solidarity in the working world. This is true in countries that have completed a certain process of industrial revolution. It is also true in countries where the main working milieu continues to be *agriculture* or other similar occupations.

Movements of solidarity in the sphere of work-a solidarity that must never mean being closed to dialogue and collaboration with others- can be necessary also with reference to the condition of social groups that were not previously included in such movements but which, in changing social systems and conditions of living, are undergoing *what is in effect "proletarianization"* or which actually already find themselves in a "proletariat" situation, one which, even if not yet given that name, in fact deserves it. This can be true of certain categories or groups of the working "intelligentsia," especially when ever wider access to education and an ever increasing number of people with degrees or diplomas in the fields of their cultural preparation are accompanied by a drop in demand for their labor. This *unemployment of intellectuals* occurs or increases when the education available is not oriented towards the types of employment or service required by the true needs of society, or when there is less



demand for work which requires education, at least professional education, than for manual labor, or when it is less well paid. Of course, education in itself is always valuable and an important enrichment of the human person; but in spite of that, "proletarianization" processes remain possible.

For this reason, *there must be continued study of the subject of work* and of the subject's living conditions. In order to achieve social justice in the various parts of the world, in the various countries, and in the relationships between them, there is a need for ever new *movements of solidarity* of the workers and *with* the workers. This solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by the social degrading of the subject of work, by exploitation of the workers, and by the growing areas of poverty and even hunger. The Church is firmly committed to this cause, for she considers it her mission, her service, a proof of her fidelity to Christ, so that she can truly be the "Church of the poor." And the "poor" appear under various forms; they appear in various places and at various times; in many cases they appear as a *result of the violation of the dignity of human work*: either because the opportunities for human work are limited as a result of the scourge of unemployment, or because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.

9. Work and Personal Dignity

Remaining within the context of man as the subject of work, it is now appropriate to touch upon, at least in a summary way, certain problems that *more closely define the dignity of human work*, in that they make it possible to characterize more fully its specific moral value. In doing this we must always keep in mind the biblical calling to "subdue the earth"¹⁴, in which is expressed the will of the Creator that work should enable man to achieve that "dominion" in the visible world that is proper to him.

God's fundamental and original intention with regard to man, whom he created in his image and after his likeness¹⁵, was not withdrawn or cancelled out even when man, having broken the original covenant with God, heard the words: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread"¹⁶. These words refer to *the sometimes heavy toil* that from then onwards has accompanied human work; but they do not alter the fact that work is the means whereby man *achieves that "dominion"* which is proper to him over the visible world, by "subjecting" the earth. Toil is something that is universally known, for it is universally experienced. It is familiar to those doing physical work under sometimes exceptionally laborious conditions. It is familiar not only to agricultural workers, who spend long days working the land, which sometimes "bears thorns and thistles"¹⁷, but also to those who work in mines and quarries, to steel-workers at their blast-furnaces, to those who work in builders' yards and in construction work, often in danger of injury or death. It is likewise familiar to those at an intellectual workbench; to scientists; to those who bear the burden of grave responsibility for decisions that will have a vast impact on society. It is familiar to doctors and nurses, who spend days and nights at their patients' bedside. It is familiar to women, who, sometimes without proper recognition on the part of society and even of their own families, bear the daily burden and responsibility for their homes and the upbringing of their children. *It is familiar to all workers* and, since work is a universal calling, it is familiar to everyone.

And yet, in spite of all this toil-perhaps, in a sense, because of it-work is a good thing for man. Even though it bears the mark of a *bonum arduum*, in the terminology of Saint Thomas¹⁸, this does not take away the fact that, as such, it is a good thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man's dignity, which expresses this dignity and increases it. If one wishes to define



more clearly the ethical meaning of work, it is this truth that one must particularly keep in mind. Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man *not only transforms nature*, adapting it to his own needs, but he also *achieves fulfillment* as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes "more a human being."

Without this consideration it is impossible to understand the meaning of the virtue of industriousness, and more particularly it is impossible to understand why industriousness should be a virtue: for virtue, as a moral habit, is something whereby man becomes good as man. This fact in no way alters our justifiable anxiety that in work, whereby *matter* gains in *nobility*, *man* himself should not experience a *lowering* of his own dignity. Again, it is well known that it is possible to use work in various ways *against man*, that it is possible to punish man with the system of forced labor in concentration camps, that work can be made into a means for oppressing man, and that in various ways it is possible to exploit human labor, that is to say the worker. All this pleads in favor of the moral obligation to link industriousness as a virtue with *the social order of work*, which will enable man to become, in work, "more a human being" and not be degraded by it not only because of the wearing out of his physical strength (which, at least up to a certain point, is inevitable), but especially through damage to the dignity and subjectivity that are proper to him.

10. Work and Society: Family and Nation

Having thus confirmed the personal dimension of human work, we must go on to the second *sphere of values* that is necessarily linked to work. Work constitutes a foundation for the formation of *family life*, which is a natural right and something that man is called to. These two spheres of values—one linked to work and the other consequent on the family nature of human life—must be properly united and must properly permeate each other. In a way, work is a condition for making it possible to found a family, since the family requires the means of subsistence which man normally gains through work. Work and industriousness also influence the whole *process of education* in the family, for the very reason that everyone "becomes a human being" through, among other things, work, and becoming a human being is precisely the main purpose of the whole process of education. Obviously, two aspects of work in a sense come into play here: the one making family life and its upkeep possible, and the other making possible the achievement of the purposes of the family, especially education. Nevertheless, these two aspects of work are linked to one another and are mutually complementary in various points.

It must be remembered and affirmed that the family constitutes one of the most important terms of reference for shaping the social and ethical order of human work. The teaching of the Church has always devoted special attention to this question, and in the present document we shall have to return to it. In fact, the family is simultaneously a *community made possible by work* and the first *school of work*, within the home, for every person.

The third sphere of values that emerges from this point of view—that of the subject of work—concerns the *great society* to which man belongs on the basis of particular cultural and historical links. This society—even when it has not yet taken on the mature form of a nation—is not only the great "educator" of every man, even though an indirect one (because each individual absorbs within the family the contents and values that go to make up the culture of a given nation); it is also a great historical and social incarnation of the work of all generations. All of this brings it about that man combines his deepest human identity with membership of a nation, and intends his work also to



increase the common good developed together with his compatriots, thus realizing that in this way work serves to add to the heritage of the whole human family, of all the people living in the world.

These three spheres are always *important for human work* in its subjective dimension. And this dimension, that is to say, the concrete reality of the worker, takes precedence over the objective dimension. In the subjective dimension there is realized, first of all, that "dominion" over the world of nature to which man is called from the beginning according to the words of the Book of Genesis. The very process of "subduing the earth," that is to say work, is marked in the course of history, and especially in recent centuries, by an immense development of technological means. This is an advantageous and positive phenomenon, on condition that the objective dimension of work does not gain the upper hand over the subjective dimension, depriving man of his dignity and inalienable rights or reducing them.

ELEMENTS FOR A SPIRITUALITY OF WORK

24. A Particular Task for the Church

It is right to devote the last part of these reflections about human work, on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, to the spirituality of work in the Christian sense. Since work in its subjective aspect is always a personal action, an *actus personae*, it follows that *the whole person, body and spirit*, participates in it, whether it is manual or intellectual work. It is also to the whole person that the word of the living God is directed, the evangelical message of salvation, in which we find many points which concern human work and which throw particular light on it. These points need to be properly assimilated: an inner effort on the part of the human spirit, guided by faith, hope and charity, is needed in order that through these points the *work* of the individual human being may *be given the meaning which it has in the eyes of God* and by means of which work enters into the salvation process on a par with the other ordinary yet particularly important components of its texture.

The Church considers it her duty to speak out on work from the viewpoint of its human value and of the moral order to which it belongs, and she sees this as one of her important tasks within the service that she renders to the evangelical message as a whole. At the same time she sees it as her particular duty *to form a spirituality of work* which will help all people to come closer, through work, to God, the Creator and Redeemer, to participate in his salvific plan for man and the world and to deepen their friendship with Christ in their lives by accepting, through faith, a living participation in his threefold mission as Priest, Prophet and King, as the Second Vatican Council so eloquently teaches.

25. Work as a Sharing in the Activity of the Creator

As the Second Vatican Council says, "throughout the course of the centuries, men have labored to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort. To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, such human activity accords with God's will. For man, created to God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all that it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to him who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. Thus, by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth."

The word of God's revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that *man*, created in the image of God, *shares by his work in the activity of the Creator* and that, within the limits of his



own human capabilities, man in a sense continues to develop that activity, and perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation. We find this truth at the very beginning of Sacred Scripture, in the Book of Genesis, where the creation activity itself is presented in the form of "work" done by God during "six days," "resting" on the seventh day²⁹. Besides, the last book of Sacred Scripture echoes the same respect for what God has done through his creative "work" when it proclaims: "Great and wonderful are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty;" this is similar to the Book of Genesis, which concludes the description of each day of creation with the statement: "And God saw that it was good."

This description of creation, which we find in the very first chapter of the Book of Genesis, is also *in a sense the first "gospel of work."* For it shows what the dignity of work consists of: it teaches that man ought to imitate God, his Creator, in working, because man alone has the unique characteristic of likeness to God. Man ought to imitate God both in working and also in resting, since God himself wished to present his own creative activity under the form of *work and rest*. This activity by God in the world always continues, as the words of Christ attest: "My Father is working still ...": he works with creative power by sustaining in existence the world that he called into being from nothing, and he works with salvific power in the hearts of those whom from the beginning he has destined for "rest" in union with himself in his "Father's house." Therefore man's work too not only requires a rest every "seventh day," but also cannot consist in the mere exercise of human strength in external action; it must leave room for man to prepare himself, by becoming more and more what in the will of God he ought to be, for the *"rest" that the Lord reserves for his servants and friends*.

Awareness that man's work is a participation in God's activity ought to permeate, as the Council teaches, even *"the most ordinary everyday activities"*. For, while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women are performing their activities in a way that appropriately benefits society. They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brothers and sisters, and contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan."

This Christian spirituality of work should be a heritage shared by all. Especially in the modern age, the *spirituality* of work should show the *maturity* called for by the tensions and restlessness of mind and heart. "Far from thinking that works produced by man's own talent and energy are in opposition to God's power, and that the rational creature exists as a kind of rival to the Creator, Christians are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's greatness and the flowering of his own mysterious design. For the greater man's power becomes, the farther his individual and community responsibility extends. ... People are not deterred by *the Christian message* from building up the world, or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows. They are, rather, more stringently bound to do these very things."

The knowledge that by means of work man shares in the work of creation constitutes the most profound *motive* for undertaking it in various sectors. "The faithful, therefore," we read in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, "must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, and its orientation to the praise of God. Even by their secular activity they must assist one another to live holier lives. In this way the world will be permeated by the spirit of Christ and more effectively achieve its purpose in justice, charity and peace... Therefore, by their competence in secular fields and by their personal activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them work vigorously so that by



human labor, technical skill, and civil culture created goods may be perfected according to the design of the Creator and the light of his Word.”

26. *Christ, the Man of Work*

The truth that by means of work man participates in the activity of God himself, his Creator, was *given particular prominence by Jesus Christ*-the Jesus at whom many of his first listeners in Nazareth "were astonished, saying, 'Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him?.. Is not this the carpenter?'" For Jesus not only proclaimed but first and foremost fulfilled by his deeds the "gospel," the word of eternal Wisdom, that had been entrusted to him. Therefore this was also "the gospel of work," because *he who proclaimed it was himself a man of work*, a craftsman like Joseph of Nazareth. And if we do not find in his words a special command to work-but rather on one occasion a prohibition against too much anxiety about work and life- at the same time the eloquence of the life of Christ is unequivocal: he belongs to the "working world," he has appreciation and respect for human work. It can indeed be said that *he looks with love upon human work* and the different forms that it takes, seeing in each one of these forms a particular facet of man's likeness with God, the Creator and Father. Is it not he who says: "My Father is the vinedresser," and in various ways puts *into his teaching* the fundamental truth about work which is already expressed in the whole tradition of the Old Testament, beginning with the Book of Genesis?

The books of the Old Testament contain many references to human work and to the individual professions exercised by man: for example, the doctor, the pharmacist, the craftsman or artist, the blacksmith - we could apply these words to today's foundry - workers - the potter, the farmer, the scholar, the sailor, the builder, the musician, the shepherd, and the fisherman. The words of praise for the work of women are well known. *In his parables on the Kingdom of God* Jesus Christ constantly refers to human work: that of the shepherd, the farmer, the doctor, the sower, the householder, the servant, the steward, the fisherman, the merchant, the laborer. He also speaks of the various form of women's work. He compares the apostolate to the manual work of harvesters or fishermen. He refers to the work of scholars too.

This teaching of Christ on work, based on the example of his life during his years in Nazareth, finds a particularly lively echo *in the teaching of the Apostle Paul*. Paul boasts of working at his trade (he was probably a tent-maker), and thanks to that work he was able even as an Apostle to earn his own bread. "With toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you." Hence his instructions, in the form of *exhortation and command*, on the subject of work: "Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living," he writes to the Thessalonians. In fact, noting that some "are living in idleness ... not doing any work," the Apostle does not hesitate to say in the same context: "If any one will not work, let him not eat." In another passage *he encourages* his readers: "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward."

The teachings of the Apostle of the Gentiles obviously have key importance for the morality and spirituality of human work. They are an important complement to the great though discreet gospel of work that we find in the life and parables of Christ, in what Jesus "did and taught."

On the basis of these illuminations emanating from the Source himself, the Church has always proclaimed what we find *expressed in modern terms* in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council:



"Just as human activity proceeds from man, so it is ordered towards man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood, this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered ... Hence, the norm of human activity is this: that in accord with the divine plan and will, it should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race, and allow people as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfill it."

Such a *vision of the values of human work*, or in other words such a spirituality of work, fully explains what we read in the same section of the Council's Pastoral Constitution with regard to the right *meaning of progress*: "A person is more precious for what he is than for what he has. Similarly, all that people do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, and a more humane ordering of social relationships has greater worth than technical advances. For these advances can supply the material for human progress, but of themselves alone they can never actually bring it about."

This teaching on the question of progress and development—a subject that dominates present-day thought—can be understood only as the fruit of a tested spirituality of human work; and it is *only on the basis of such a spirituality* that it can be realized and put into practice. This is the teaching, and also the program, that has its roots in "the gospel of work."

27. Human Work in the Light of the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ

There is yet another aspect of human work, an essential dimension of it, that is profoundly imbued with the spirituality based on the Gospel. All *work*, whether manual or intellectual, is inevitably linked with *toil*. The Book of Genesis expresses it in a truly penetrating manner: the original *blessing* of work contained in the very mystery of creation and connected with man's elevation as the image of God is contrasted with the *curse* that *sin* brought with it: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life." This toil connected with work marks the way of human life on earth and constitutes *an announcement of death*: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken." Almost as an echo of these words, the author of one of the Wisdom books says: "Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it." There is no one on earth who could not apply these words to himself.

In a sense, the final word of the Gospel on this matter as on others is found in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. It is here that we must seek an answer to these problems so important for the spirituality of human work. *The Paschal Mystery* contains *the Cross* of Christ and his obedience unto death, which the Apostle contrasts with the disobedience that from the beginning has burdened man's history on earth. It also contains *the elevation* of Christ, who by means of death on a Cross returns to his disciples in *the Resurrection* with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sweat and toil, which work necessarily involves the present condition of the human race, present the Christian and everyone who is called to follow Christ with the possibility of sharing lovingly in the work that Christ came to do. This work of salvation came about through suffering and death on a Cross. By enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity. He shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross in his turn every day in the activity that he is called upon to perform.

Christ, "undergoing death itself for all of us sinners, taught us by example that we too must shoulder that cross which the world and the flesh inflict upon those who pursue peace and justice";



but also, at the same time, "appointed Lord by *his Resurrection* and given all authority in heaven and on earth, Christ is now at work in people's hearts through the power of his Spirit... He animates, purifies, and strengthens those noble longings too, by which the human family strives *to make its life more human* and to render the whole earth submissive to this goal."

The Christian finds in human work a small part of the Cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted his Cross for us. In work, thanks to the light that penetrates us from the Resurrection of Christ, we always find a *glimmer* of new life, of the *new good*, as if it were an announcement of "the new heavens and the new earth" in which man and the world participate precisely through the toil that goes with work. Through toil-and never without it. On the one hand this confirms the indispensability of the Cross in the spirituality of human work; on the other hand the Cross that this toil constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself, from work understood in depth and in all its aspects and never apart from work.

Is this *new good*-the fruit of human work-already a small part of that "new earth" where justice dwells? If it is true that the many forms of toil that go with man's work are a small part of the Cross of Christ, what is the relationship of this new good to *the Resurrection of Christ*?

The Council seeks to reply to this question also, drawing light from the very sources of the revealed word: "Therefore, while we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gains the whole world and loses himself (cf. *Lk 9: 25*), the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age. Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God."

In these present reflections devoted to human work we have tried to emphasize everything that seemed essential to it, since it is through man's labor that not only "the fruits of our activity" but also "human dignity, brotherhood and freedom" must increase on earth. Let the Christian who listens to the word of the living God, uniting work with prayer, know the place that his work has not only in *earthly progress* but also in *the development of the Kingdom of God*, to which we are all called through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the word of the Gospel.



Fides et Ratio, 7-35

THE REVELATION OF GOD'S WISDOM

Jesus, revealer of the Father

7. Underlying all the Church's thinking is the awareness that she is the bearer of a message that has its origin in God himself (cf. *2 Cor* 4:1-2). The knowledge that the Church offers to man has its origin not in any speculation of her own, however sublime, but in the word of God that she has received in faith (cf. *1 Th* 2:13). At the origin of our life of faith there is an encounter, unique in kind, which discloses a mystery hidden for long ages (cf. *1 Cor* 2:7; *Rom* 16:25-26) but which is now revealed: "In his goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (cf. *Eph* 1:9), by which, through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature."⁵ This initiative is utterly gratuitous, moving from God to men and women in order to bring them to salvation. As the source of love, God desires to make himself known; and the knowledge that the human being has of God perfects all that the human mind can know of the meaning of life.

8. Restating almost to the letter the teaching of the First Vatican Council's Constitution *Dei Filius*, and taking into account the principles set out by the Council of Trent, the Second Vatican Council's Constitution *Dei Verbum* pursued the age-old journey of *understanding faith*, reflecting on Revelation in the light of the teaching of Scripture and of the entire Patristic tradition. At the First Vatican Council, the Fathers had stressed the supernatural character of God's Revelation. On the basis of mistaken and very widespread assertions, the rationalist critique of the time attacked faith and denied the possibility of any knowledge that was not the fruit of reason's natural capacities. This obliged the Council to reaffirm emphatically that there exists a knowledge that is peculiar to faith, surpassing the knowledge proper to human reason, which nevertheless by its nature can discover the Creator. This knowledge expresses a truth based upon the very fact of God who reveals himself, a truth that is most certain, since God neither deceives nor wishes to deceive.

9. The First Vatican Council teaches, then, that the truth attained by philosophy and the truth of Revelation are neither identical nor mutually exclusive: "There exists a twofold order of knowledge, distinct not only as regards their source, but also as regards their object. With regard to the source, because we know in one by natural reason, in the other by divine faith. With regard to the object, because besides those things which natural reason can attain, there are proposed for our belief mysteries hidden in God which, unless they are divinely revealed, cannot be known." Based upon God's testimony and enjoying the supernatural assistance of grace, faith is of an order other than philosophical knowledge which depends upon sense perception and experience and which advances by the light of the intellect alone. Philosophy and the sciences function within the order of natural reason; while faith, enlightened and guided by the Spirit, recognizes in the message of salvation the "fullness of grace and truth" (cf. *Jn* 1:14) which God has willed to reveal in history and definitively through his Son, Jesus Christ (cf. *1 Jn* 5:9; *Jn* 5:31-32).

10. Contemplating Jesus as revealer, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council stressed the salvific character of God's Revelation in history, describing it in these terms: "In this Revelation, the invisible God (cf. *Col* 1:15; *1 Tim* 1:17), out of the abundance of his love speaks to men and women as friends (cf. *Ex* 33:11; *Jn* 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. *Bar* 3:38), so that he may invite and take them into communion with himself. This plan of Revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner



unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this Revelation, then, the deepest truth about God and human salvation is made clear to us in Christ, who is the mediator and at the same time the fullness of all Revelation.”

11. God's Revelation is therefore immersed in time and history. Jesus Christ took flesh in the “fullness of time” (*Gal* 4:4); and two thousand years later, I feel bound to restate forcefully that “in Christianity time has a fundamental importance.” It is within time that the whole work of creation and salvation comes to light; and it emerges clearly above all that, with the Incarnation of the Son of God, our life is even now a foretaste of the fulfillment of time which is to come (cf. *Heb* 1:2).

The truth about himself and his life that God has entrusted to humanity is immersed therefore in time and history; and it was declared once and for all in the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth. The Constitution *Dei Verbum* puts it eloquently: “After speaking in many places and varied ways through the prophets, God 'last of all in these days has spoken to us by his Son' (*Heb* 1:1-2). For he sent his Son, the eternal Word who enlightens all people, so that he might dwell among them and tell them the innermost realities about God (cf. *Jn* 1:1-18). Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, sent as 'a human being to human beings', 'speaks the words of God' (*Jn* 3:34), and completes the work of salvation that his Father gave him to do (cf. *Jn* 5:36; 17:4). To see Jesus is to see his Father (*Jn* 14:9). For this reason, Jesus perfected Revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious Resurrection from the dead and finally his sending of the Spirit of truth.”

For the People of God, therefore, history becomes a path to be followed to the end, so that by the unceasing action of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Jn* 16:13) the contents of revealed truth may find their full expression. This is the teaching of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* when it states that “as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly progresses towards the fullness of divine truth, until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.”

12. History therefore becomes the arena where we see what God does for humanity. God comes to us in the things we know best and can verify most easily, the things of our everyday life, apart from which we cannot understand ourselves.

In the Incarnation of the Son of God we see forged the enduring and definitive synthesis which the human mind of itself could not even have imagined: the Eternal enters time, the Whole lies hidden in the part, God takes on a human face. The truth communicated in Christ's Revelation is therefore no longer confined to a particular place or culture, but is offered to every man and woman who would welcome it as the word which is the absolutely valid source of meaning for human life. Now, in Christ, all have access to the Father, since by his Death and Resurrection Christ has bestowed the divine life that the first Adam had refused (cf. *Rom* 5:12-15). Through this Revelation, men and women are offered the ultimate truth about their own life and about the goal of history. As the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* puts it, “only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.” Seen in any other terms, the mystery of personal existence remains an insoluble riddle. Where might the human being seek the answer to dramatic questions such as pain, the suffering of the innocent and death, if not in the light streaming from the mystery of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection?

Reason before the mystery



13. It should nonetheless be kept in mind that Revelation remains charged with mystery. It is true that Jesus, with his entire life, revealed the countenance of the Father, for he came to teach the secret things of God. But our vision of the face of God is always fragmentary and impaired by the limits of our understanding. Faith alone makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently.

The Council teaches that “the obedience of faith must be given to God who reveals himself.” This brief but dense statement points to a fundamental truth of Christianity. Faith is said first to be an obedient response to God. This implies that God be acknowledged in his divinity, transcendence and supreme freedom. By the authority of his absolute transcendence, God who makes himself known is also the source of the credibility of what he reveals. By faith, men and women give their *assent* to this divine testimony. This means that they acknowledge fully and integrally the truth of what is revealed because it is God himself who is the guarantor of that truth. They can make no claim upon this truth which comes to them as gift and which, set within the context of interpersonal communication, urges reason to be open to it and to embrace its profound meaning. This is why the Church has always considered the act of entrusting oneself to God to be a moment of fundamental decision that engages the whole person. In that act, the intellect and the will display their spiritual nature, enabling the subject to act in a way which realizes personal freedom to the full. It is not just that freedom is part of the act of faith: it is absolutely required. Indeed, it is faith that allows individuals to give consummate expression to their own freedom. Put differently, freedom is not realized in decisions made against God. For how could it be an exercise of true freedom to refuse to be open to the very reality that enables our self-realization? Men and women can accomplish no more important act in their lives than the act of faith; it is here that freedom reaches the certainty of truth and chooses to live in that truth.

To assist reason in its effort to understand the mystery there are the signs which Revelation itself presents. These serve to lead the search for truth to new depths, enabling the mind in its autonomous exploration to penetrate within the mystery by use of reason's own methods, of which it is rightly jealous. Yet these signs also urge reason to look beyond their status as signs in order to grasp the deeper meaning that they bear. They contain a hidden truth to which the mind is drawn and which it cannot ignore without destroying the very signs that it is given.

In a sense, then, we return to the *sacramental* character of Revelation and especially to the sign of the Eucharist, in which the indissoluble unity between the signifier and signified makes it possible to grasp the depths of the mystery. In the Eucharist, Christ is truly present and alive, working through his Spirit; yet, as Saint Thomas said so well, “what you neither see nor grasp, faith confirms for you, leaving nature far behind; a sign it is that now appears, hiding in mystery realities sublime.” He is echoed by the philosopher Pascal: “Just as Jesus Christ went unrecognized among men, so does his truth appear without external difference among common modes of thought. So too does the Eucharist remain among common bread.”

In short, the knowledge proper to faith does not destroy the mystery; it only reveals it the more, showing how necessary it is for people's lives: Christ the Lord “in revealing the mystery of the Father and his love fully reveals man to himself and makes clear his supreme calling,” which is to share in the divine mystery of the life of the Trinity.

14. From the teaching of the two Vatican Councils there also emerges a genuinely novel consideration for philosophical learning. Revelation has set within history a point of reference that cannot be ignored if the mystery of human life is to be known. Yet this knowledge refers back



constantly to the mystery of God that the human mind cannot exhaust but can only receive and embrace in faith. Between these two poles, reason has its own specific field in which it can enquire and understand, restricted only by its finiteness before the infinite mystery of God.

Revelation therefore introduces into our history a universal and ultimate truth which stirs the human mind to ceaseless effort; indeed, it impels reason continually to extend the range of its knowledge until it senses that it has done all in its power, leaving no stone unturned. To assist our reflection on this point we have one of the most fruitful and important minds in human history, a point of reference for both philosophy and theology: Saint Anselm. In his *Proslogion*, the Archbishop of Canterbury puts it this way: “Thinking of this problem frequently and intently, at times it seemed I was ready to grasp what I was seeking; at other times it eluded my thought completely, until finally, despairing of being able to find it, I wanted to abandon the search for something which was impossible to find. I wanted to rid myself of that thought because, by filling my mind, it distracted me from other problems from which I could gain some profit; but it would then present itself with ever greater insistence... Woe is me, one of the poor children of Eve, far from God, what did I set out to do and what have I accomplished? What was I aiming for and how far have I got? What did I aspire to and what did I long for?... O Lord, you are not only that than which nothing greater can be conceived (*non solum es quo maius cogitari nequit*), but you are greater than all that can be conceived (*quiddam maius quam cogitari possit*)... If you were not such, something greater than you could be thought, but this is impossible.”

15. The truth of Christian Revelation, found in Jesus of Nazareth, enables all men and women to embrace the “mystery” of their own life. As absolute truth, it summons human beings to be open to the transcendent, whilst respecting both their autonomy as creatures and their freedom. At this point the relationship between freedom and truth is complete, and we understand the full meaning of the Lord's words: “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (*Jn 8:32*).

Christian Revelation is the true lodestar of men and women as they strive to make their way amid the pressures of an immanentist habit of mind and the constrictions of a technocratic logic. It is the ultimate possibility offered by God for the human being to know in all its fullness the seminal plan of love that began with creation. To those wishing to know the truth, if they can look beyond themselves and their own concerns, there is given the possibility of taking full and harmonious possession of their lives, precisely by following the path of truth. Here the words of the Book of Deuteronomy are pertinent: “This commandment which I command you is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear and do it?' But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that you can do it” (30:11-14). This text finds an echo in the famous dictum of the holy philosopher and theologian Augustine: “Do not wander far and wide but return into yourself. Deep within man there dwells the truth” (*Noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi. In interiore homine habitat veritas*).

These considerations prompt a first conclusion: the truth made known to us by Revelation is neither the product nor the consummation of an argument devised by human reason. It appears instead as something gratuitous, which itself stirs thought and seeks acceptance as an expression of love. This revealed truth is set within our history as an anticipation of that ultimate and definitive vision of God that is reserved for those who believe in him and seek him with a sincere heart. The ultimate purpose of personal existence, then, is the theme of philosophy and theology alike. For all



their difference of method and content, both disciplines point to that “path of life” (*Ps* 16:11) which, as faith tells us, leads in the end to the full and lasting joy of the contemplation of the Triune God.

CREDO UT INTELLEGAM

“*Wisdom knows all and understands all*” (*Wis* 9:11)

16. Sacred Scripture indicates with remarkably clear cues how deeply related are the knowledge conferred by faith and the knowledge conferred by reason; and it is in *the Wisdom literature* that this relationship is addressed most explicitly. What is striking about these biblical texts, if they are read without prejudice, is that they embody not only the faith of Israel, but also the treasury of cultures and civilizations that have long vanished. As if by special design, the voices of Egypt and Mesopotamia sound again and certain features common to the cultures of the ancient Near East come to life in these pages that are so singularly rich in deep intuition.

It is no accident that, when the sacred author comes to describe the wise man, he portrays him as one who loves and seeks the truth: “Happy the man who meditates on wisdom and reasons intelligently, who reflects in his heart on her ways and ponders her secrets. He pursues her like a hunter and lies in wait on her paths. He peers through her windows and listens at her doors. He camps near her house and fastens his tent-peg to her walls; he pitches his tent near her and so finds an excellent resting-place; he places his children under her protection and lodges under her boughs; by her he is sheltered from the heat and he dwells in the shade of her glory” (*Sir* 14:20-27).

For the inspired writer, as we see, the desire for knowledge is characteristic of all people. Intelligence enables everyone, believer and non-believer, to reach “the deep waters” of knowledge (cf. *Prov* 20:5). It is true that ancient Israel did not come to knowledge of the world and its phenomena by way of abstraction, as did the Greek philosopher or the Egyptian sage. Still less did the good Israelite understand knowledge in the way of the modern world that tends more to distinguish different kinds of knowing. Nonetheless, the biblical world has made its own distinctive contribution to the theory of knowledge.

What is distinctive in the biblical text is the conviction that there is a profound and indissoluble unity between the knowledge of reason and the knowledge of faith. The world and all that happens within it, including history and the fate of peoples, are realities to be observed, analyzed and assessed with all the resources of reason, but without faith ever being foreign to the process. Faith intervenes not to abolish reason's autonomy nor to reduce its scope for action, but solely to bring the human being to understand that in these events it is the God of Israel who acts. Thus the world and the events of history cannot be understood in depth without professing faith in the God who is at work in them. Faith sharpens the inner eye, opening the mind to discover in the flux of events the workings of Providence. Here the words of the Book of Proverbs are pertinent: “The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps” (16:9). This is to say that with the light of reason human beings can know which path to take, but they can follow that path to its end, quickly and unhindered, only if with a rightly tuned spirit they search for it within the horizon of faith. Therefore, reason and faith cannot be separated without diminishing the capacity of men and women to know themselves, the world and God in an appropriate way.

17. There is thus no reason for competition of any kind between reason and faith: each contains the other, and each has its own scope for action. Again the Book of Proverbs points in this direction when it exclaims: “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things



out” (*Prov* 25:2). In their respective worlds, God and the human being are set within a unique relationship. In God there lies the origin of all things, in him is found the fullness of the mystery, and in this his glory consists; to men and women there falls the task of exploring truth with their reason, and in this their nobility consists. The Psalmist adds one final piece to this mosaic when he says in prayer: “How deep to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I try to count them, they are more than the sand. If I come to the end, I am still with you” (139:17-18). The desire for knowledge is so great and it works in such a way that the human heart, despite its experience of insurmountable limitation, yearns for the infinite riches which lie beyond, knowing that there is to be found the satisfying answer to every question as yet unanswered.

18. We may say, then, that Israel, with her reflection, was able to open to reason the path that leads to the mystery. With the Revelation of God Israel could plumb the depths of all that she sought in vain to reach by way of reason. On the basis of this deeper form of knowledge, the Chosen People understood that, if reason were to be fully true to itself, then it must respect certain basic rules. The first of these is that reason must realize that human knowledge is a journey which allows no rest; the second stems from the awareness that such a path is not for the proud who think that everything is the fruit of personal conquest; a third rule is grounded in the “fear of God” whose transcendent sovereignty and provident love in the governance of the world reason must recognize.

In abandoning these rules, the human being runs the risk of failure and ends up in the condition of “the fool.” For the Bible, in this foolishness there lies a threat to life. The fool thinks that he knows many things, but really he is incapable of fixing his gaze on the things that truly matter. Therefore he can neither order his mind (*Prov* 1:7) nor assume a correct attitude to himself or to the world around him. And so when he claims that “God does not exist” (cf. *Ps* 14:1), he shows with absolute clarity just how deficient his knowledge is and just how far he is from the full truth of things, their origin and their destiny.

19. The Book of Wisdom contains several important texts that cast further light on this theme. There the sacred author speaks of God who reveals himself in nature. For the ancients, the study of the natural sciences coincided in large part with philosophical learning. Having affirmed that with their intelligence human beings can “know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements... the cycles of the year and the constellations of the stars, the natures of animals and the tempers of wild beasts” (*Wis* 7:17, 19-20)—in a word, that he can philosophize—the sacred text takes a significant step forward. Making his own the thought of Greek philosophy, to which he seems to refer in the context, the author affirms that, in reasoning about nature, the human being can rise to God: “From the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (*Wis* 13:5). This is to recognize as a first stage of divine Revelation the marvelous “book of nature,” which, when read with the proper tools of human reason, can lead to knowledge of the Creator. If human beings with their intelligence fail to recognize God as Creator of all, it is not because they lack the means to do so, but because their free will and their sinfulness place an impediment in the way.

20. Seen in this light, reason is valued without being overvalued. The results of reasoning may in fact be true, but these results acquire their true meaning only if they are set within the larger horizon of faith: “All man's steps are ordered by the Lord: how then can man understand his own ways?” (*Prov* 20:24). For the Old Testament, then, faith liberates reason in so far as it allows reason to attain correctly what it seeks to know and to place it within the ultimate order of things, in which everything acquires true meaning. In brief, human beings attain truth by way of reason because, enlightened by



faith, they discover the deeper meaning of all things and most especially of their own existence. Rightly, therefore, the sacred author identifies the fear of God as the beginning of true knowledge: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (*Prov* 1:7; cf. *Sir* 1:14).

“Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding” (*Prov* 4:5)

21. For the Old Testament, knowledge is not simply a matter of careful observation of the human being, of the world and of history, but supposes as well an indispensable link with faith and with what has been revealed. These are the challenges that the Chosen People had to confront and to which they had to respond. Pondering this as his situation, biblical man discovered that he could understand himself only as “being in relation”—with himself, with people, with the world and with God. This opening to the mystery, which came to him through Revelation, was for him, in the end, the source of true knowledge. It was this that allowed his reason to enter the realm of the infinite where an understanding for which until then he had not dared to hope became a possibility.

For the sacred author, the task of searching for the truth was not without the strain that comes once the limits of reason are reached. This is what we find, for example, when the Book of Proverbs notes the weariness that comes from the effort to understand the mysterious designs of God (cf. 30:1-6). Yet, for all the toil involved, believers do not surrender. They can continue on their way to the truth because they are certain that God has created them “explorers” (cf. *Qob* 1:13), whose mission it is to leave no stone unturned, though the temptation to doubt is always there. Leaning on God, they continue to reach out, always and everywhere, for all that is beautiful, good and true.

22. In the first chapter of his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul helps us to appreciate better the depth of insight of the Wisdom literature's reflection. Developing a philosophical argument in popular language, the Apostle declares a profound truth: through all that is created the “eyes of the mind” can come to know God. Through the medium of creatures, God stirs in reason an intuition of his “power” and his “divinity” (cf. *Rom* 1:20). This is to concede to human reason a capacity that seems almost to surpass its natural limitations. Not only is it not restricted to sensory knowledge, from the moment that it can reflect critically upon the data of the senses, but, by discoursing on the data provided by the senses, reason can reach the cause that lies at the origin of all perceptible reality. In philosophical terms, we could say that this important Pauline text affirms the human capacity for metaphysical enquiry.

According to the Apostle, it was part of the original plan of the creation that reason should without difficulty reach beyond the sensory data to the origin of all things: the Creator. But because of the disobedience by which man and woman chose to set themselves in full and absolute autonomy in relation to the One who had created them, this ready access to God the Creator diminished.

This is the human condition vividly described by the Book of Genesis when it tells us that God placed the human being in the Garden of Eden, in the middle of which there stood “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (2:17). The symbol is clear: man was in no position to discern and decide for himself what was good and what was evil, but was constrained to appeal to a higher source. The blindness of pride deceived our first parents into thinking themselves sovereign and autonomous, and into thinking that they could ignore the knowledge that comes from God. All men and women were caught up in this primal disobedience, which so wounded reason that from then on its path to full truth would be strewn with obstacles. From that time onwards the human capacity to know the truth was impaired by an aversion to the One who is the source and origin of truth. It is again the Apostle



who reveals just how far human thinking, because of sin, became “empty,” and human reasoning became distorted and inclined to falsehood (cf. *Rom* 1:21-22). The eyes of the mind were no longer able to see clearly: reason became more and more a prisoner to itself. The coming of Christ was the saving event that redeemed reason from its weakness, setting it free from the shackles in which it had imprisoned itself.

23. This is why the Christian's relationship to philosophy requires thorough-going discernment. In the New Testament, especially in the Letters of Saint Paul, one thing emerges with great clarity: the opposition between “the wisdom of this world” and the wisdom of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The depth of revealed wisdom disrupts the cycle of our habitual patterns of thought, which are in no way able to express that wisdom in its fullness.

The beginning of the First Letter to the Corinthians poses the dilemma in a radical way. The crucified Son of God is the historic event upon which every attempt of the mind to construct an adequate explanation of the meaning of existence upon merely human argumentation comes to grief. The true key-point, which challenges every philosophy, is Jesus Christ's death on the Cross. It is here that every attempt to reduce the Father's saving plan to purely human logic is doomed to failure. “Where is the one who is wise? Where is the learned? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (*1 Cor* 1:20), the Apostle asks emphatically. The wisdom of the wise is no longer enough for what God wants to accomplish; what is required is a decisive step towards welcoming something radically new: “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise...; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not to reduce to nothing things that are” (*1 Cor* 1:27-28). Human wisdom refuses to see in its own weakness the possibility of its strength; yet Saint Paul is quick to affirm: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (*2 Cor* 12:10). Man cannot grasp how death could be the source of life and love; yet to reveal the mystery of his saving plan God has chosen precisely that which reason considers “foolishness” and a “scandal.” Adopting the language of the philosophers of his time, Paul comes to the summit of his teaching as he speaks the paradox: “God has chosen in the world... that which is nothing to reduce to nothing things that are” (cf. *1 Cor* 1:28). In order to express the gratuitous nature of the love revealed in the Cross of Christ, the Apostle is not afraid to use the most radical language of the philosophers in their thinking about God. Reason cannot eliminate the mystery of love that the Cross represents, while the Cross can give to reason the ultimate answer that it seeks. It is not the wisdom of words, but the Word of Wisdom that Saint Paul offers as the criterion of both truth and salvation.

The wisdom of the Cross, therefore, breaks free of all cultural limitations that seek to contain it and insists upon an openness to the universality of the truth that it bears. What a challenge this is to our reason, and how great the gain for reason if it yields to this wisdom! Of itself, philosophy is able to recognize the human being's ceaselessly self-transcendent orientation towards the truth; and, with the assistance of faith, it is capable of accepting the “foolishness” of the Cross as the authentic critique of those who delude themselves that they possess the truth, when in fact they run it aground on the shoals of a system of their own devising. The preaching of Christ crucified and risen is the reef upon which the link between faith and philosophy can break up, but it is also the reef beyond which the two can set forth upon the boundless ocean of truth. Here we see not only the border between reason and faith, but also the space where the two may meet.

CHAPTER III - INTELLEGO UT CREDAM



Journeying in search of truth

24. In the Acts of the Apostles, the Evangelist Luke tells of Paul's coming to Athens on one of his missionary journeys. The city of philosophers was full of statues of various idols. One altar in particular caught his eye, and he took this as a convenient starting-point to establish a common base for the proclamation of the kerygma. "Athenians," he said, "I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (*Acts 17:22-23*). From this starting-point, Saint Paul speaks of God as Creator, as the One who transcends all things and gives life to all. He then continues his speech in these terms: "From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us" (*Acts 17:26-27*).

The Apostle accentuates a truth that the Church has always treasured: in the far reaches of the human heart there is a seed of desire and nostalgia for God. The Liturgy of Good Friday recalls this powerfully when, in praying for those who do not believe, we say: "Almighty and eternal God, you created mankind so that all might long to find you and have peace when you are found." There is therefore a path that the human being may choose to take, a path that begins with reason's capacity to rise beyond what is contingent and set out towards the infinite.

In different ways and at different times, men and women have shown that they can articulate this intimate desire of theirs. Through literature, music, painting, sculpture, architecture and every other work of their creative intelligence they have declared the urgency of their quest. In a special way philosophy has made this search its own and, with its specific tools and scholarly methods, has articulated this universal human desire.

25. "All human beings desire to know," and truth is the proper object of this desire. Everyday life shows how concerned each of us is to discover for ourselves, beyond mere opinions, how things really are. Within visible creation, man is the only creature who not only is capable of knowing but who knows that he knows, and is therefore interested in the real truth of what he perceives. People cannot be genuinely indifferent to the question of whether what they know is true or not. If they discover that it is false, they reject it; but if they can establish its truth, they feel themselves rewarded. It is this that Saint Augustine teaches when he writes: "I have met many who wanted to deceive, but none who wanted to be deceived." It is rightly claimed that persons have reached adulthood when they can distinguish independently between truth and falsehood, making up their own minds about the objective reality of things. This is what has driven so many enquiries, especially in the scientific field, which in recent centuries have produced important results, leading to genuine progress for all humanity.

No less important than research in the theoretical field is research in the practical field—by which I mean the search for truth that looks to the good that is to be performed. In acting ethically, according to a free and rightly tuned will, the human person sets foot upon the path to happiness and moves towards perfection. Here too it is a question of truth. It is this conviction that I stressed in my Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*: "There is no morality without freedom... Although each individual has a right to be respected in his own journey in search of the truth, there exists a prior moral obligation, and a grave one at that, to seek the truth and to adhere to it once it is known."



It is essential, therefore, that the values chosen and pursued in one's life be true, because only true values can lead people to realize themselves fully, allowing them to be true to their nature. The truth of these values is to be found not by turning in on oneself but by opening oneself to apprehend that truth even at levels that transcend the person. This is an essential condition for us to become ourselves and to grow as mature, adult persons.

26. The truth comes initially to the human being as a question: *Does life have a meaning? Where is it going?* At first sight, personal existence may seem completely meaningless. It is not necessary to turn to the philosophers of the absurd or to the provocative questioning found in the Book of Job in order to have doubts about life's meaning. The daily experience of suffering—in one's own life and in the lives of others—and the array of facts which seem inexplicable to reason are enough to ensure that a question as dramatic as the question of meaning cannot be evaded. Moreover, the first absolutely certain truth of our life, beyond the fact that we exist, is the inevitability of our death. Given this unsettling fact, the search for a full answer is inescapable. Each of us has both the desire and the duty to know the truth of our own destiny. We want to know if death will be the definitive end of our life or if there is something beyond—if it is possible to hope for an after-life or not. It is not insignificant that the death of Socrates gave philosophy one of its decisive orientations, no less decisive now than it was more than two thousand years ago. It is not by chance, then, that faced with the fact of death philosophers have again and again posed this question, together with the question of the meaning of life and immortality.

27. No-one can avoid this questioning, neither the philosopher nor the ordinary person. The answer we give will determine whether or not we think it possible to attain universal and absolute truth; and this is a decisive moment of the search. Every truth—if it really is truth—presents itself as universal, even if it is not the whole truth. If something is true, then it must be true for all people and at all times. Beyond this universality, however, people seek an absolute which might give to all their searching a meaning and an answer—something ultimate, which might serve as the ground of all things. In other words, they seek a final explanation, a supreme value, which refers to nothing beyond itself and which puts an end to all questioning. Hypotheses may fascinate, but they do not satisfy. Whether we admit it or not, there comes for everyone the moment when personal existence must be anchored to a truth recognized as final, a truth which confers a certitude no longer open to doubt.

Through the centuries, philosophers have sought to discover and articulate such a truth, giving rise to various systems and schools of thought. But beyond philosophical systems, people seek in different ways to shape a “philosophy” of their own—in personal convictions and experiences, in traditions of family and culture, or in journeys in search of life's meaning under the guidance of a master. What inspires all of these is the desire to reach the certitude of truth and the certitude of its absolute value.

The different faces of human truth

28. The search for truth, of course, is not always so transparent nor does it always produce such results. The natural limitation of reason and the inconstancy of the heart often obscure and distort a person's search. Truth can also drown in a welter of other concerns. People can even run from the truth as soon as they glimpse it because they are afraid of its demands. Yet, for all that they may evade it, the truth still influences life. Life in fact can never be grounded upon doubt, uncertainty or deceit;



such an existence would be threatened constantly by fear and anxiety. One may define the human being, therefore, as *the one who seeks the truth*.

29. It is unthinkable that a search so deeply rooted in human nature would be completely vain and useless. The capacity to search for truth and to pose questions itself implies the rudiments of a response. Human beings would not even begin to search for something of which they knew nothing or for something that they thought was wholly beyond them. Only the sense that they can arrive at an answer leads them to take the first step. This is what normally happens in scientific research. When scientists, following their intuition, set out in search of the logical and verifiable explanation of a phenomenon, they are confident from the first that they will find an answer, and they do not give up in the face of setbacks. They do not judge their original intuition useless simply because they have not reached their goal; rightly enough they will say that they have not yet found a satisfactory answer.

The same must be equally true of the search for truth when it comes to the ultimate questions. The thirst for truth is so rooted in the human heart that to be obliged to ignore it would cast our existence into jeopardy. Everyday life shows well enough how each one of us is preoccupied by the pressure of a few fundamental questions and how in the soul of each of us there is at least an outline of the answers. One reason why the truth of these answers convinces is that they are no different in substance from the answers to which many others have come. To be sure, not every truth to which we come has the same value. But the sum of the results achieved confirms that in principle the human being can arrive at the truth.

30. It may help, then, to turn briefly to the different modes of truth. Most of them depend upon immediate evidence or are confirmed by experimentation. This is the mode of truth proper to everyday life and to scientific research. At another level we find philosophical truth, attained by means of the speculative powers of the human intellect. Finally, there are religious truths which are to some degree grounded in philosophy, and which we find in the answers that the different religious traditions offer to the ultimate questions.

The truths of philosophy, it should be said, are not restricted only to the sometimes ephemeral teachings of professional philosophers. All men and women, as I have noted, are in some sense philosophers and have their own philosophical conceptions with which they direct their lives. In one way or other, they shape a comprehensive vision and an answer to the question of life's meaning; and in the light of this they interpret their own life's course and regulate their behavior. At this point, we may pose the question of the link between, on the one hand, the truths of philosophy and religion and, on the other, the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. But before tackling that question, one last datum of philosophy needs to be weighed.

31. Human beings are not made to live alone. They are born into a family and in a family they grow, eventually entering society through their activity. From birth, therefore, they are immersed in traditions that give them not only a language and a cultural formation but also a range of truths in which they believe almost instinctively. Yet personal growth and maturity imply that these same truths can be cast into doubt and evaluated through a process of critical enquiry. It may be that, after this time of transition, these truths are "recovered" as a result of the experience of life or by dint of further reasoning. Nonetheless, there are in the life of a human being many more truths that are simply believed than truths that are acquired by way of personal verification. Who, for instance, could assess critically the countless scientific findings upon which modern life is based? Who could personally examine the flow of information which comes day after day from all parts of the world and which is



generally accepted as true? Who in the end could forge anew the paths of experience and thought which have yielded the treasures of human wisdom and religion? This means that the human being—the one who seeks the truth—is also *the one who lives by belief*.

32. In believing, we entrust ourselves to the knowledge acquired by other people. This suggests an important tension. On the one hand, the knowledge acquired through belief can seem an imperfect form of knowledge, to be perfected gradually through personal accumulation of evidence; on the other hand, belief is often humanly richer than mere evidence, because it involves an interpersonal relationship and brings into play not only a person's capacity to know but also the deeper capacity to entrust oneself to others, to enter into a relationship with them which is intimate and enduring.

It should be stressed that the truths sought in this interpersonal relationship are not primarily empirical or philosophical. Rather, what is sought is *the truth of the person*—what the person is and what the person reveals from deep within. Human perfection, then, consists not simply in acquiring an abstract knowledge of the truth, but in a dynamic relationship of faithful self-giving with others. It is in this faithful self-giving that a person finds a fullness of certainty and security. At the same time, however, knowledge through belief, grounded as it is on trust between persons, is linked to truth: in the act of believing, men and women entrust themselves to the truth which the other declares to them.

Any number of examples could be found to demonstrate this; but I think immediately of the martyrs, who are the most authentic witnesses to the truth about existence. The martyrs know that they have found the truth about life in the encounter with Jesus Christ, and nothing and no-one could ever take this certainty from them. Neither suffering nor violent death could ever lead them to abandon the truth that they have discovered in the encounter with Christ. This is why to this day the witness of the martyrs continues to arouse such interest, to draw agreement, to win such a hearing and to invite emulation. This is why their word inspires such confidence: from the moment they speak to us of what we perceive deep down as the truth we have sought for so long, the martyrs provide evidence of a love that has no need of lengthy arguments in order to convince. The martyrs stir in us a profound trust because they give voice to what we already feel and they declare what we would like to have the strength to express.

33. Step by step, then, we are assembling the terms of the question. It is the nature of the human being to seek the truth. This search looks not only to the attainment of truths that are partial, empirical or scientific; nor is it only in individual acts of decision-making that people seek the true good. Their search looks towards an ulterior truth that would explain the meaning of life. And it is therefore a search that can reach its end only in reaching the absolute. Thanks to the inherent capacities of thought, man is able to encounter and recognize a truth of this kind. Such a truth—vital and necessary as it is for life—is attained not only by way of reason but also through trusting acquiescence to other persons who can guarantee the authenticity and certainty of the truth itself. There is no doubt that the capacity to entrust oneself and one's life to another person and the decision to do so are among the most significant and expressive human acts.

It must not be forgotten that reason too needs to be sustained in all its searching by trusting dialogue and sincere friendship. A climate of suspicion and distrust, which can beset speculative research, ignores the teaching of the ancient philosophers who proposed friendship as one of the most appropriate contexts for sound philosophical enquiry.

From all that I have said to this point it emerges that men and women are on a journey of discovery which is humanly unstoppable—a search for the truth and a search for a person to whom they might



entrust themselves. Christian faith comes to meet them, offering the concrete possibility of reaching the goal that they seek. Moving beyond the stage of simple believing, Christian faith immerses human beings in the order of grace, which enables them to share in the mystery of Christ, which in turn offers them a true and coherent knowledge of the Triune God. In Jesus Christ, who is the Truth, faith recognizes the ultimate appeal to humanity, an appeal made in order that what we experience as desire and nostalgia may come to its fulfillment.

34. This truth, which God reveals to us in Jesus Christ, is not opposed to the truths which philosophy perceives. On the contrary, the two modes of knowledge lead to truth in all its fullness. The unity of truth is a fundamental premise of human reasoning, as the principle of non-contradiction makes clear. Revelation renders this unity certain, showing that the God of creation is also the God of salvation history. It is the one and the same God who establishes and guarantees the intelligibility and reasonableness of the natural order of things upon which scientists confidently depend, and who reveals himself as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This unity of truth, natural and revealed, is embodied in a living and personal way in Christ, as the Apostle reminds us: “Truth is in Jesus” (cf. *Eph* 4:21; *Col* 1:15-20). He is the *eternal Word* in whom all things were created, and he is the *incarnate Word* who in his entire person reveals the Father (cf. *Jn* 1:14, 18). What human reason seeks “without knowing it” (cf. *Acts* 17:23) can be found only through Christ: what is revealed in him is “the full truth” (cf. *Jn* 1:14-16) of everything which was created in him and through him and which therefore in him finds its fulfillment (cf. *Col* 1:17).

35. On the basis of these broad considerations, we must now explore more directly the relationship between revealed truth and philosophy. This relationship imposes a twofold consideration, since the truth conferred by Revelation is a truth to be understood in the light of reason. It is this duality alone that allows us to specify correctly the relationship between revealed truth and philosophical learning. First, then, let us consider the links between faith and philosophy in the course of history. From this, certain principles will emerge as useful reference-points in the attempt to establish the correct link between the two orders of knowledge.



Evangelium Vitae, 39-47

"From man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting" (Gen 9:5): reverence and love for every human life

39. Man's life comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. God therefore is the sole Lord of this life: man cannot do with it as he wills. God himself makes this clear to Noah after the Flood: "For your own lifeblood, too, I will demand an accounting ... and from man in regard to his fellow man I will demand an accounting for human life" (Gen 9:5). The biblical text is concerned to emphasize how the sacredness of life has its foundation in God and in his creative activity: "For God made man in his own image" (Gen 9:6).

Human life and death are thus in the hands of God, in his power: "In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind," exclaims Job (12:10). "The Lord brings to death and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Sam 2:6). He alone can say: "It is I who bring both death and life" (Dt 32:39).

But God does not exercise this power in an arbitrary and threatening way, but rather as part of his care and loving concern for his creatures. If it is true that human life is in the hands of God, it is no less true that these are loving hands, like those of a mother who accepts, nurtures and takes care of her child: "I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul" (Ps 131:2; cf. Is 49:15; 66:12-13; Hos 11:4). Thus Israel does not see in the history of peoples and in the destiny of individuals the outcome of mere chance or of blind fate, but rather the results of a loving plan by which God brings together all the possibilities of life and opposes the powers of death arising from sin: "God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist" (Wis 1:13-14).

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

41. The commandment "You shall not kill," included and more fully expressed in the positive command of love for one's neighbor, is reaffirmed in all its force by the Lord Jesus. To the rich young man who asks him: "Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?," Jesus replies: "If you



would enter life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19:16,17). And he quotes, as the first of these: "You shall not kill" (Mt 19:18). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus demands from his disciples a righteousness which surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees, also with regard to respect for life: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (Mt 5:21-22).

By his words and actions Jesus further unveils the positive requirements of the commandment regarding the inviolability of life. These requirements were already present in the Old Testament, where legislation dealt with protecting and defending life when it was weak and threatened: in the case of foreigners, widows, orphans, the sick and the poor in general, including children in the womb (cf. Ex 21:22; 22:20-26). With Jesus these positive requirements assume new force and urgency, and are revealed in all their breadth and depth: they range from caring for the life of one's brother (whether a blood brother, someone belonging to the same people, or a foreigner living in the land of Israel) to showing concern for the stranger, even to the point of loving one's enemy.

A stranger is no longer a stranger for the person who must become a neighbor to someone in need, to the point of accepting responsibility for his life, as the parable of the Good Samaritan shows so clearly (cf. Lk 10:25-37). Even an enemy ceases to be an enemy for the person who is obliged to love him (cf. Mt 5:38-48; Lk 6:27-35), to "do good" to him (cf. Lk 6:27, 33, 35) and to respond to his immediate needs promptly and with no expectation of repayment (cf. Lk 6:34-35). The height of this love is to pray for one's enemy. By so doing we achieve harmony with the providential love of God: "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:44-45; cf. Lk 6:28, 35).

Thus the deepest element of God's commandment to protect human life is the requirement to show reverence and love for every person and the life of every person. This is the teaching that the Apostle Paul, echoing the words of Jesus, addresses to the Christians in Rome: "The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet', and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:9-10).

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28): man's responsibility for life

42. To defend and promote life, to show reverence and love for it, is a task which God entrusts to every man, calling him as his living image to share in his own lordship over the world: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'" (Gen 1:28).

The biblical text clearly shows the breadth and depth of the lordship that God bestows on man. It is a matter first of all of dominion over the earth and over every living creature, as the Book of Wisdom makes clear: "O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy ... by your wisdom you have formed man, to have dominion over the creatures you have made, and rule the world in holiness and righteousness" (Wis 9:1, 2-3). The Psalmist too extols the dominion given to man as a sign of glory and honor from his Creator: "You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things



under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea" (Ps 8:6-8).

As one called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15), man has a specific responsibility towards the environment in which he lives, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations. It is the ecological question-ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of the different species of animals and of other forms of life to "human ecology" properly speaking - which finds in the Bible clear and strong ethical direction, leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life. In fact, "the dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to 'use and misuse', or to dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to 'eat of the fruit of the tree' (cf. Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity."

43. A certain sharing by man in God's lordship is also evident in the specific responsibility that he is given for human life as such. It is a responsibility that reaches its highest point in the giving of life through procreation by man and woman in marriage. As the Second Vatican Council teaches: "God himself who said, 'It is not good for man to be alone' (Gen 2:18) and 'who made man from the beginning male and female' (Mt 19:4), wished to share with man a certain special participation in his own creative work. Thus he blessed male and female saying: 'Increase and multiply' (Gen 1:28).

By speaking of "a certain special participation" of man and woman in the "creative work" of God, the Council wishes to point out that having a child is an event which is deeply human and full of religious meaning, insofar as it involves both the spouses, who form "one flesh" (Gen 2:24), and God who makes himself present. As I wrote in my Letter to Families: "When a new person is born of the conjugal union of the two, he brings with him into the world a particular image and likeness of God himself: the genealogy of the person is inscribed in the very biology of generation. In affirming that the spouses, as parents, cooperate with God the Creator in conceiving and giving birth to a new human being, we are not speaking merely with reference to the laws of biology. Instead, we wish to emphasize that God himself is present in human fatherhood and motherhood quite differently than he is present in all other instances of begetting 'on earth.' Indeed, God alone is the source of that 'image and likeness' which is proper to the human being, as it was received at Creation. Begetting is the continuation of Creation."

This is what the Bible teaches in direct and eloquent language when it reports the joyful cry of the first woman, "the mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20). Aware that God has intervened, Eve exclaims: "I have begotten a man with the help of the Lord" (Gen 4:1). In procreation therefore, through the communication of life from parents to child, God's own image and likeness is transmitted, thanks to the creation of the immortal soul. The beginning of the "book of the genealogy of Adam" expresses it in this way: "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and called them man when they were created. When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth" (Gen 5:1-3). It is precisely in their role as co-workers with God who transmits his image to the new creature that we see the greatness of couples who are ready "to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior, who through them will enlarge and enrich his own family day by day." This is



why the Bishop Amphilochius extolled "holy matrimony, chosen and elevated above all other earthly gifts" as "the begetter of humanity, the creator of images of God."

Thus, a man and woman joined in matrimony become partners in a divine undertaking: through the act of procreation, God's gift is accepted and a new life opens to the future.

But over and above the specific mission of parents, the task of accepting and serving life involves everyone; and this task must be fulfilled above all towards life when it is at its weakest. It is Christ himself who reminds us of this when he asks to be loved and served in his brothers and sisters who are suffering in any way: the hungry, the thirsty, the foreigner, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned ... Whatever is done to each of them is done to Christ himself (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

"For you formed my inmost being" (Ps 139:13): the dignity of the unborn child

44. Human life finds itself most vulnerable when it enters the world and when it leaves the realm of time to embark upon eternity. The word of God frequently repeats the call to show care and respect, above all where life is undermined by sickness and old age. Although there are no direct and explicit calls to protect human life at its very beginning, specifically life not yet born, and life nearing its end, this can easily be explained by the fact that the mere possibility of harming, attacking, or actually denying life in these circumstances is completely foreign to the religious and cultural way of thinking of the People of God.

In the Old Testament, sterility is dreaded as a curse, while numerous offspring are viewed as a blessing: "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward" (Ps 127:3; cf. Ps 128:3-4). This belief is also based on Israel's awareness of being the people of the Covenant, called to increase in accordance with the promise made to Abraham: "Look towards heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them ... so shall your descendants be" (Gen 15:5). But more than anything else, at work here is the certainty that the life which parents transmit has its origins in God. We see this attested in the many biblical passages that respectfully and lovingly speak of conception, of the forming of life in the mother's womb, of giving birth and of the intimate connection between the initial moment of life and the action of God the Creator.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (Jer 1:5): the life of every individual, from its very beginning, is part of God's plan. Job, from the depth of his pain, stops to contemplate the work of God who miraculously formed his body in his mother's womb. Here he finds reason for trust, and he expresses his belief that there is a divine plan for his life: "You have fashioned and made me; will you then turn and destroy me? Remember that you have made me of clay; and will you turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love; and your care has preserved my spirit" (Job 10:8-12). Expressions of awe and wonder at God's intervention in the life of a child in its mother's womb occur again and again in the Psalms.

How can anyone think that even a single moment of this marvelous process of the unfolding of life could be separated from the wise and loving work of the Creator, and left prey to human caprice? Certainly the mother of the seven brothers did not think so; she professes her faith in God, both the source and guarantee of life from its very conception, and the foundation of the hope of new life beyond death: "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world,



who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws" (2 Mac 7:22-23).

45. The New Testament revelation confirms the indisputable recognition of the value of life from its very beginning. The exaltation of fruitfulness and the eager expectation of life resound in the words with which Elizabeth rejoices in her pregnancy: "The Lord has looked on me ... to take away my reproach among men" (Lk 1:25). And even more so, the value of the person from the moment of conception is celebrated in the meeting between the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, and between the two children whom they are carrying in the womb. It is precisely the children who reveal the advent of the Messianic age: in their meeting, the redemptive power of the presence of the Son of God among men first becomes operative. As Saint Ambrose writes: "The arrival of Mary and the blessings of the Lord's presence are also speedily declared ... Elizabeth was the first to hear the voice; but John was the first to experience grace. She heard according to the order of nature; he leaped because of the mystery. She recognized the arrival of Mary; he the arrival of the Lord. The woman recognized the woman's arrival; the child, that of the child. The women speak of grace; the babies make it effective from within to the advantage of their mothers who, by a double miracle, prophesy under the inspiration of their children. The infant leaped, the mother was filled with the Spirit. The mother was not filled before the son, but after the son was filled with the Holy Spirit, he filled his mother too."³⁶

*"I kept my faith even when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted' " (Ps 116:10):
life in old age and at times of suffering*

46. With regard to the last moments of life too, it would be anachronistic to expect biblical revelation to make express reference to present-day issues concerning respect for elderly and sick persons, or to condemn explicitly attempts to hasten their end by force. The cultural and religious context of the Bible is in no way touched by such temptations; indeed, in that context the wisdom and experience of the elderly are recognized as a unique source of enrichment for the family and for society.

Old age is characterized by dignity and surrounded with reverence (cf. 2 Mac 6:23). The just man does not seek to be delivered from old age and its burden; on the contrary his prayer is this: "You, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth ... so even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, till I proclaim your might to all the generations to come" (Ps 71:5, 18). The ideal of the Messianic age is presented as a time when "no more shall there be ... an old man who does not fill out his days" (Is 65:20).

In old age, how should one face the inevitable decline of life? How should one act in the face of death? The believer knows that his life is in the hands of God: "You, O Lord, hold my lot" (cf. Ps 16:5), and he accepts from God the need to die: "This is the decree from the Lord for all flesh, and how can you reject the good pleasure of the Most High?" (Sir 41:3-4). Man is not the master of life, nor is he the master of death. In life and in death, he has to entrust himself completely to the "good pleasure of the Most High," to his loving plan.

In moments of sickness too, man is called to have the same trust in the Lord and to renew his fundamental faith in the One who "heals all your diseases" (cf. Ps 103:3). When every hope of good health seems to fade before a person's eyes-so as to make him cry out: "My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass" (Ps 102:11)- even then the believer is sustained by an unshakable faith in God's life-giving power. Illness does not drive such a person to despair and to seek death, but makes him cry out in hope: "I kept my faith, even when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted' " (Ps 116:10);



"O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the pit" (Ps 30:2-3).

47. The mission of Jesus, with the many healings he performed, shows God's great concern even for man's bodily life. Jesus, as "the physician of the body and of the spirit," was sent by the Father to proclaim the good news to the poor and to heal the brokenhearted (cf. Lk 4:18; Is 61:1). Later, when he sends his disciples into the world, he gives them a mission, a mission in which healing the sick goes hand in hand with the proclamation of the Gospel: "And preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Mt 10:7-8; cf. Mk 6:13; 16:18).

Certainly the life of the body in its earthly state is not an absolute good for the believer, especially as he may be asked to give up his life for a greater good. As Jesus says: "Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mk 8:35). The New Testament gives many different examples of this. Jesus does not hesitate to sacrifice himself and he freely makes of his life an offering to the Father (cf. Jn 10:17) and to those who belong to him (cf. Jn 10:15). The death of John the Baptist, precursor of the Savior, also testifies that earthly existence is not an absolute good; what is more important is remaining faithful to the word of the Lord even at the risk of one's life (cf. Mk 6:17-29). Stephen, losing his earthly life because of his faithful witness to the Lord's Resurrection, follows in the Master's footsteps and meets those who are stoning him with words of forgiveness (cf. Acts 7:59-60), thus becoming the first of a countless host of martyrs whom the Church has venerated since the very beginning.

No one, however, can arbitrarily choose whether to live or die; the absolute master of such a decision is the Creator alone, in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).



Pope Francis, Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Council for Culture
November 18, 2017

Dear brothers and sisters,

I welcome you and I thank Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi for his greeting and his introduction. This Plenary Assembly has chosen as its theme the anthropological question, proposing to understand the future lines of development of science and technology. Among the many possible issues for discussion, your attention has focused particularly on three subjects.

First, *medicine and genetics*, which enable us to look inside the most intimate structure of the human being and even to intervene so as to modify it. This makes us capable of weakening diseases considered incurable just a short time ago; but it also opens up the possibility of determining human beings by “programming,” so to speak, certain qualities.

Secondly, the *neurosciences* offer increasingly greater information on the functioning of the human brain. Among these, fundamental realities of Christian anthropology such as the soul, self-awareness, and freedom are shown now in an unprecedented light and may even be seriously questioned by some.

Finally, the incredible progress of *autonomous and thinking machines*, which have already become to a certain extent components of our everyday life, leads us to reflect on what is specifically human and makes us different from machines.

All these scientific and technological developments induce some to think that we find ourselves in a unique moment in the history of humanity, almost at the dawn of a new age and at the birth of a new human being, superior to what we have known so far.

They are in effect great and serious questions and issues that we find ourselves facing. They have been in part anticipated by science fiction literature and films, echoes of man’s fears and expectations. Therefore, the Church, which follows closely the joys and hopes, the anguish and fears of men in our time, wishes to place the human person and the questions that relate to it at the center of her reflections.

The question on the human being: “What is man that you are mindful of him?” (Psalm 8: 5) resonates in the Bible from its very first pages, and has accompanied all the journey of Israel and of the Church. To this question, the Bible itself offered an anthropological answer, which is already outlined in Genesis and runs through all of the Revelation, developing around the fundamental elements of *relationship* and *freedom*. Relationship draws on a threefold dimension: towards matter, land and animals; towards divine transcendence; and towards other human beings. Freedom expresses itself in self-reliance – naturally relative – and in moral choices. This fundamental system has for centuries sustained the thought of much of mankind and still maintains its validity today. But, at the same time, today we realize that the great principles and fundamental concepts of anthropology are rarely called into question even on the basis of a greater awareness of the complexity of the human condition, and require further exploration.

Anthropology is the horizon of self-understanding in which we all move, and it determines our own concept of the world and our existential and ethical choices. In our times, it has often become a fluid, changing landscape as a result of socio-economic changes, population shifts, and intercultural exchange, but also due to the spread of a global culture and, above all, the incredible discoveries of science and technology.



How should we react to these challenges? First of all, we must express our gratitude to the men and women of science for their efforts and for their commitment to humanity. This *appreciation of the sciences*, which we have not always known how to manifest, finds its ultimate foundation in the plan of God Who “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world ... [and] predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons” (*Eph* 1: 3-5), and Who entrusted us with the care of creation, “working and taking care of” the earth (cf. *Gen* 2.15). Precisely because man is the image and likeness of a God Who created the world for love, the care of all of creation must follow the logic of gratuity and love, of service, and not of domination and bullying.

Science and technology have helped us further the boundaries of knowledge of nature and, in particular, of the human being. But they alone are not enough to provide all the answers. Today, we increasingly realize that it is necessary to draw on the treasures of wisdom preserved in religious traditions, popular wisdom, literature and the arts, which touch the depths of the mystery of human existence, not forgetting, but rather rediscovering those contained in philosophy and in theology.

As I wished to affirm in the Encyclical *Laudato si'*, “we urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge ... in the service of a more integral and integrating vision” (no. 141), so as to be able to overcome the tragic division between the “two cultures,” the humanistic-literary-theological and the scientific, which leads to a mutual impoverishment, and to encourage a greater dialogue between the Church, community of believers, and the scientific community.

The Church, for her part, offers some great principles to sustain this dialogue. The first is the *centrality of the human person*, which must be considered an end and not a means. This must be placed in harmonious relation to creation, not as a despot guarding God’s legacy but rather as a loving custodian of the work of the Creator.

The second principle it is necessary to remember is that of the *universal destination of goods*, which also regards those of knowledge and technology. Scientific and technological progress serves the good of all humanity, and their benefits cannot be of advantage only to a few. In this way, one avoids that the future will add new inequalities based on knowledge, and increase the gap between rich and poor. The great decisions on the direction of scientific research and investments in the latter must be taken by society as a whole and not dictated solely by the rules of the market or the interest of the few.

Finally, the principle remains that *not all that is technically possible or feasible is therefore ethically acceptable*. Science, like any other human activity, knows that there are limits to be observed for the good of humanity itself, and requires a sense of ethical responsibility. The true measure of progress, as Blessed Paul VI recalled, is that which aims at the good of every man and man.



Peter Kreeft, "Why a Christian Anthropology Makes a Difference"

Of the two words in the term "Christian anthropology," I assume that I don't need to define the word *Christian* because the Church has been doing that for two thousand years — they're called creeds. But what about anthropology?

By *anthropology* I mean simply a *logos* about *anthropos*, a theory or philosophy about mankind or human nature. I don't mean the empirical science of anthropology. Everyone, absolutely everyone, needs a philosophical anthropology, especially everyone in the medical profession. But not everyone needs to be a scientific anthropologist, or to have an anthropologist, as everyone does need to have a physician. Everyone needs a physician, but not everyone needs a physicist.

On the other hand, everyone needs not to have a philosopher, but to be a philosopher, though not everyone needs to be a professional philosopher. I think Socrates, the archetype and model for all philosophers, would say that a professional philosopher is a contradiction in terms, because philosopher means literally a lover of wisdom, so professional philosopher means a professional lover, and we all know what that means. Socrates would call people like me intellectual prostitutes. I sell not my body but my mind for money. And today the Catholic Medical Association is my pimp.

You can avoid being a professional philosopher, but you can't avoid being a philosopher, a lover of wisdom. To love wisdom is simply to be human, just as to love beauty and goodness is simply to be human. The hunger for wisdom is an innate and universal hunger. No-one wants to be a fool. We have innate hungers not only in our bodies, but also in our souls. We have not only physical hungers for food and drink and sleep and sex, but also spiritual hungers for spiritual foods, such as duty and truth and goodness and joy and wisdom and friendship.

One of our spiritual hungers is for truth. Truth comes in at least two different kinds: scientific facts and philosophical wisdom. We get the first kind from sense experience and quantitative calculation. We get the second kind from understanding. The scientific method refines and amplifies our senses by inventing instruments like microscopes and cameras, and refines our quantitative reasoning by instruments like computers. But none of this can give us wisdom and understanding.

The author of Job understood this point over twenty-five centuries ago, when he put these words into the mouth of Job:

"Surely there is a mine for silver and a place for gold which they refine. Iron is taken out of the earth, and copper is smelted from the ore. Men put an end to darkness and search out to the farthest limit the ore, in gloom and deep darkness. . . . Man puts his hand to the flinty rock, and overturns mountains by the roots. He cuts out channels in the rocks and his eye sees every precious thing. . . . He dams up streams, so they do not trickle, and things that are hidden he brings forth to light. But where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding? Man does not know the way to it, and it is not found in the land of the living. The deep says, 'It is not in me,' and the sea says 'It is not with me.' It cannot be bought for gold, and silver cannot be weighed as its price. . . . It is hidden from the eyes of all the living, and concealed from the birds of the air. . . . God alone understands the way to it, and He knows its place. . . . He established it, and searched it out. And He said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, that is understanding.'" Job 28:1 ff.

The difference between science and philosophy, between knowledge and wisdom, is not a difference in degree but in kind. No refinement or amplification of factual knowledge will bring us



one step closer to wisdom and understanding, just as no refinement of special effects will give a movie a profound theme, an engaging plot, or believable characters.

By the way, I think that's the typical difference between the old and new movies and books and philosophical systems and works of art. That's why in all these fields the crude and primitive often seems more profound than the modern and sophisticated. There are a number of distinctions between knowledge and wisdom, science and philosophy. For instance, science is content with immediate proximate explanations and causes, while philosophy seeks ultimate explanations and causes. But I think the most important difference is that wisdom always has a values dimension. Science is, or tries to be, values neutral. Its demand is that of Sergeant Joe Friday on the old *Dragnet* TV series: Just the facts, ma'am.

For instance, science tells you whether you can clone or abort or clone or heal an organism, and how to do it, if you can, but it doesn't tell you whether you should do it, whether it's good. Many contemporary philosophers believe that philosophy can't tell you that, either. They are the moral skeptics, or moral relativists, or moral subjectivists. But philosophy at least raises such questions, tries to give you the answers, where science doesn't. In that way, philosophy is like religion. Philosophy and religion have different methods: reason versus faith. But they ask many of the same questions. Science has not only a different method, but different questions. One of the questions both philosophy and religion ask is the question of philosophical anthropology. What is man? Know thyself, as Socrates famously said, echoing the Delphic oracle.

Another aside here. At the risk of offending many people in any typical modern audience, I shall use standard English rather than politically correct feminist English, and I shall interpret the word man inclusively, as referring equally to males and females, as all books did until the 1960s and 70s, when the linguistic puritans decreed that the word man meant only males, and excluded females, so that when all the authors of all the great books said Man is mortal, or Man is wicked, they really meant to exclude females, since they were of course male chauvinists like everyone else in that horrible oppressive system called western civilization, until the recent sudden enlightenment that went along with the recent glorious sexual revolution. Now, I really don't enjoy offending people especially female people, since I regard them with awe and love and wonder. But honesty compels me to demur from jumping through the new linguistic hoops, because I cannot help suspecting that to tell Shakespeare and Milton and the translators of the King James Bible what they really meant to say seems to me just a wee bit arrogant. When the psalmist prayed "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" I cannot bring myself to believe that he was thinking of the awesomeness only of males. Or that he should be censured for not having said instead, "What are males, females, the transgendered, the hermaphroditic, and any other possible or actual arrangement of sexual identity and orientation, that thou art mindful of him, her, them or it?" I don't think we have enough time or enough paper today to write like that, so doing that is not responsibly modern or up-to-date, for if we do it, we will require an ecological disaster in decimating all of our forests to make all the paper, and we will not have enough time left in our days to serve our slave masters, our email screens.

The four most important questions philosophy asks are the following: First, what is real? That is the question of metaphysics. Metaphysics goes beyond physics not by focusing on the spiritual instead of the physical, but by asking the most universal questions, questions that pertain to everything real. Second, what are we who ask such questions? That is the question of philosophical anthropology.



Third, what should we be and do? That is the question of ethics. Fourth, how do we know such things? How do we know anything? That is the question of epistemology, or theory of knowing.

The questions of ethics are obviously the most interesting, and the most important, and the most necessary, and the most unavoidable. But your ethics is always dependent on your anthropology, and on your metaphysics. For you can't know what is good for man until you know what man is. And metaphysics always comes in, because what man is depends on what is.

For instance, if souls, spirits, gods, and heavens are all unreal, then you will have a very different ethics, and a very different anthropology than you will have if you believe that they are real. You will have a materialistic one. And if you believe that matter and bodies are unreal, as some philosophies and religions do, then again you will have a very different ethics and a very different anthropology. If spirit is only a myth, then the only real goods are material goods, and virtue is only the habit of giving material things and pleasures to others. If matter is only a dream, then you physicians are only playing with dreams when you heal bodies. If souls are illusions, man is only an animal with an attitude. If bodies are illusions, man is only a god with a disguise. It is simply impossible to agree on ethics, on how to act, on what is good and what is not, if you disagree about metaphysics or anthropology. And since ethics is unavoidable, so is anthropology. But my topic is not why we need a philosophical anthropology, but why we need a Christian anthropology.

Christianity is not a man-made rational philosophy. It is the God-made revealed religion. Christianity does not contradict reason; nothing true does. But its central claims are not provable by reason alone. That God is a trinity, that God loves us, that God sent his son to die to save us from sin, that Christ is both fully God and fully man, that we will rise from death because He did. To believe these things is to be a Christian, and to disbelieve them is to be a non-Christian. They are the articles of faith. Why are some people Christians? The only honest reason to be a Christian is that you believe these things are true.

Two other reasons often given for being a Christian are to be good and to be happy. Being good and being happy are indeed two very important things. They are both ends rather than means. No one ever wants to be happy only as a means to something else, like getting rich. No one says, "What good is happiness? It can't buy money." And — well, maybe some people do — and no-one ever should be good only as a means to something else, like getting rich or getting elected. No comment there. So happiness and goodness are both ends rather than means.

But truth is also an end, and an absolute. And I think truth even has to trump goodness and happiness, if necessary. And I don't think that's my private opinion, or some controversial philosophical theory. I think that is what you all believe and practice. And I think I can prove it. Is there anyone here who still literally believes in Santa Claus? No. But do you remember how good you were and how happy you were when you were three years old, especially in December, because you did believe that? See how honest you are? You can't sacrifice truth either for goodness or happiness. The only honest reason why anyone should ever believe anything is that it's true. Other motives can count too — that it makes you good and that it makes you happy are valid selling points; but truth has to come first as the foundation for absolutely everything else.

The fundamental reason we need a Christian anthropology, then, is that a Christian anthropology is true. Not, first of all, because it is a means to some other end, however important that other end may be, such as being wise, and being able to intelligently discriminate between good and evil medical practices. Yes, if we are Christians we will be wiser, because we will know extremely important truths



and values that we would not know otherwise, so that we will be able to act more wisely and morally in medicine and in life generally. But truth has to come first; we need to know the truth just to know the truth. Truth is first of all an end, before it can be a means to any other ends. So I will try to list a few things that a Christian anthropology teaches us. Things that we probably would not know, or not fully know, or not certainly know, or not fully appreciate, or not fully understand, without Christianity. All these things also make us and our lives more happy and more good. But the first reason for believing them is that they're true. If they're not true, we shouldn't believe them, even if they make us happy or good.

One thing that a Christian anthropology teaches us is a corollary of my point about the absolute value of truth: we must respect the honest motives of our non-Christian friends when they disagree with us about what is truly good. If, for instance, there is no God, no heaven, and no soul, and if there is no absolute moral law, and if earthly pleasure is the highest end, then suicide and euthanasia appear as quite logical options. Whose life is it, anyway? If it's not God's, it's mine. If God is not my god, I am my own god. As a Southern Baptist preacher once said, "I can summarize the whole Bible in four words. God's trying to get across just two things to us: Number 1 - I'm God. Number 2 - You're not." We keep forgetting that second part, don't we?

Or, alternatively, if matter is a dream, as many Hindus and Buddhists believe, then it logically follows that medical services are optional and dispensable. And compassion and charity to the suffering and dying are not absolute moral obligations. It's quite logical to believe that a dying derelict is working out his karma, the karma of his dream life, and that therefore we shouldn't interfere. Now it may well be true that the motives of the non-Christian are dishonest motives. He may only be trying to weasel out of uncomfortably difficult moral obligations. But that may not be true. He may simply be being honest, like Dr. Rieux in Albert Camus's *The Plague*, who cannot bring himself to believe in God, even though he knows that the meaning of life is to be a saint, and you can't be a saint without God.

I'm not saying that we should not try to persuade unbelievers to act otherwise. Nor am I saying that the only way to do that is first convert them to Christianity. Often, we can appeal to reason, common sense, or the shards and relics of Christianity that they still have rattling around in their heads without their knowing that they came from Christianity in the first place. Notions like the intrinsic dignity of all men, or inherent and inalienable rights. Many unbelievers will admit such rights. And this admission can logically lead them to God as the necessary foundation of these rights. Just as belief in God logically lead to formulating these rights, historically. Both of those two kinds of argument are possible because you can reason back from the effect to the cause or forward from the cause to the effect. But it makes an enormous difference. If there are such inherent rights, they cannot be abrogated by other people, or by the state, because they were not given by other people, or by the state. If all men have inherent dignity and are to be treated as ends rather than means, then it is reasonable to argue that the only adequate metaphysical basis for this dignity is the existence of God, and the fact that he gave us this dignity by creating us in his image, as persons, as subjects, rather than mere objects. As things that can say I and freely choose.

But people don't have to follow that argument all the way up to God in order to know that we do have inherent rights. Just as they don't have to believe in the Creator in order to know a lot about the creation. For God has left in man's conscience a much more clear and powerful witness about his will than the witness that he has left in man's mind about his nature. The different religions of the world have radically different ideas of God, or the nature of ultimate reality, but they all teach a remarkably



similar and remarkably high morality. And even atheists and agnostics often believe this high morality without believing in its metaphysical basis. Religion gives you a much stronger reason, a much stronger foundation, for those moral beliefs. And among religions, Christianity gives the strongest foundation of all.

I will now offer you a short list of some of the central truths about man that are indispensable for a Christian anthropology. They are indispensable because they make a radical difference. They have a radical impact on our lives, and our practice, and our choices, especially medical practice and choices. I divide the list into four groups, of four points each.

The first group is four truths that even intelligent, honest atheists and agnostics can know, and often do know, if they're wise enough. The second is four truths that all the great religions of the world teach. The third is four distinctively Christian revelations, and the fourth is four distinctively Catholic ones. When I say distinctively Catholic, I don't deny that many non-Catholics also often agree with the Church about these things, like contraception, for instance.

By the way, I find that my Protestant students at the King's College in New York are much more Catholic on that issue and on many others than my supposedly Catholic students at Boston College. Boston College stands for Barely Catholic (B.C.). We used to be Catholic; now we're Jesuit. Some of my best friends are Jesuits — never mind. Also many Jews, Muslims and even some Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians or Taoists believe some of the things I will call distinctively Christian, such as the loving benevolence of God, and the need for divine grace. Not all of them, but some of them. And many atheists believe some generically religious truths, like the need for humility before a cosmic mystery that engulfs us and transcends us.

So I give you sixteen theses in anthropology, in order of increasing specificity. Four each from philosophical wisdom, from generic religion, from Christianity, and from Catholicism.

I include all four levels because Catholic means two things, both something specific — the faith of the Roman Catholic Church, and something generic, for the word Catholic means literally 'universal.' The pieces of generic universal human wisdom included by Catholicism are just as important as the specific uniquely Catholic points. For grace includes nature and perfects it, rather than setting it aside or offering an alternative to it. In each of these four groups I give you four points because of the four great philosophical questions: metaphysics, anthropology, ethics and epistemology.

Four Truths that All Can Know

First, the four truths about man from the philosophical wisdom that all can know, regardless of religious beliefs or lack of them. The first and perhaps foundational truth of all is the metaphysical truth about humility. Reality is such that man must be humble before it. Man should be like a child before anything--truth or meaning or value or design or mystery or intelligence--that transcends him, even if this is not God, and even if this is such a mystery that it can never be known. Even some so-called humanists can sense that man is not the supreme reality, and that we are taller when we bow. Even atheists who refuse to adore can be wise enough to have awe and wonder.

Imagine a teenager or young adult who has been raised in a religious environment but who has never personally internalized it, never experienced the basic humility and awe and wonder that is the psychological basis for all religion. This is quite common, for familiarity can breed contempt, and that's true especially of religion, if it doesn't take deeper root. Such a person often experiences religious awe and humility for the first time only after he has repudiated religion and become an atheist or an



agnostic. He learns, for instance, about the incredible mysteries of the cosmos. Or he is shattered and shuddered by a haunting piece of music, or by a beautiful woman's face. He has his first religious experience as an atheist. Sometimes that is a necessary beginning for his deeper return to God. God planned it. The prodigal son has to leave home in order to appreciate home.

The second truth is the epistemological truth about honesty and open-mindedness. This flows from the first point, the metaphysical point about humility before reality. We do not know everything. Even if there is no God, we are not God. Our beliefs about anything, therefore, should be revisable in light of future facts, future light, and future knowledge. Socrates' lesson number one is to know that we do not really know most of what we think we really know. In other words, there are two kinds of people in the world, fools who think they're wise, and the wise who know they that they're fools. The moral equivalent is Jesus' lesson number two: there are two kinds of people in the world, sinners who think they're saints and saints who know that they're sinners. Without lesson one, we might think that we know it all already, and we won't bother very much with lesson two. Or else we'll limit lesson two to corollaries that we can deduce from our own lesson one, which is not Socratic humility and open-mindedness, but only whatever prejudices we have and refuse to examine.

This point about open-mindedness can threaten a believer's faith whenever that faith is fragile and shakable. But I think only a faith that has been shaken and has endured can be a faith that is unshakeable. And open-mindedness more often changes unbelievers to believers than it changes believers to unbelievers. It changes atheists to agnostics, and makes them open to future revisions, including religious ones.

I think if everyone in the world, believers and unbelievers alike, became much more open-minded seekers of truth, everyone would eventually become a believer. For we have been assured by the very highest authority that all seekers find, eventually. But those who do not seek do not find. Finding does not just happen by accident, anymore than eating does. As mouths need to be opened to be fed, so do minds. Minds cannot be force-fed; there is no intravenous wisdom. As the Koran says, there can be no compulsion in matters of religion.

A corollary of this epistemological point could be called the truth about truth. That truth is an absolute, even if there is no God, no absolute being. And even if there is no other absolute moral law except the law of absolute honesty before truth, man is made for truth. Without this there can be no integrity, no human wholeness. The rest of the things in the universe do not need to have that kind of integrity. Stones have integrity and hold together by merely physical forces, by the integrity of electromagnetism. Plants and animals hold together by their organic unity, by the living, active cooperation of all their organic parts to the single end of growth and health; by the integrity of their DNA. But man becomes one, becomes himself, attains integrity, only by the free fundamental choice to stand in the light of truth, by a fundamental honesty and will to truth, which is the foundation for all communication that is not manipulation. In that word communication we find the word common and the word unity. Man lives in community only by communication, a communication in truth, a common respect for truth.

By the way, in light of this point, I honestly believe that the single most destructive, dehumanizing and dangerous philosophy in the entire history of the world, the only philosophy I cannot see the slightest glimmer of value in, is deconstructionism, which is the denial of truth, and the reduction of all communication to power. Even the Nazis had a sense of truth. Some of them actually believed their strange ideology, unlike the post-war communists. That's why the Nazis had to be defeated by war,



while communism simply imploded by itself. And the Nazis even had some sense of honor, even how horribly perverted. But deconstructionism has none of this. Deconstructionism is nothing more than a very sophisticated and scholarly sneer. Deconstructionism's hero is Nietzsche, a Nietzsche I think they make in their own image. And Nietzsche was the first philosopher to explicitly call into question the will to truth. He wrote, "Here is the most dangerous question: Why truth. Why not, rather, untruth?" This is not a mere mistake; this is deliberate. This is demonic. The Nazis may have been mass murderers, but the deconstructionists are mass sneerers. Murderers may do more harm to their victims, but I think sneerers do more harm to their own souls. The heart of a murderer is nearer to repentance than the heart of a sneerer. A murderer enters the stadium and plays the game of good and evil, though he plays on the evil side. A sneerer refuses even to enter the stadium or play the game. He just stands outside and sneers at both sides.

Third comes the anthropological truth about the intrinsic value of every man. Man is not junk, not trivial. Not absurd, not waste matter. Every thing and every enterprise in human life, including medical enterprises, must serve man, rather than man serving things or enterprises. We eat to live, not live to eat. Even atheists can believe Kant's categorical imperative: Never merely use anyone as a means; always respect everyone as an end. And this can be the basis for a worldwide humanism that is genuine and profound, even though not explicitly religious.

Fourth is the ethical truth about love. Love — the love that is not a mere passing emotion, but a resolved choice of the will, the will to the good of the other, good will, altruism — this kind of love is the highest value in human life. Because only love makes man fully human. Love is not only good ethics; it is good anthropology and good metaphysics, too. It is the way to become more human and more real, as well as more good. A lover augments not only his doing, but his being. Even though love sometimes entails sacrifice, that always pays, deep down in the long run. On your deathbed, you will not regret loving too much. And you will always regret loving too little. He who loses his life for love finds it, even in this life. Even if there is no next life, no resurrection, and no God.

Four Truths that All Religions Teach

Next come four truths about man from religion, that is, generic, global religious wisdom. First, there's the metaphysical truth about human destiny, or the summum bonum, the greatest good: That the best answer we can know to the best question we can ask, the question of the ultimate meaning of human life, is the answer common to all the great religions of the world: that the meaning of life is something like God; that our destiny and our fulfillment and our happiness consists in something beyond this world, beyond the secular, beyond the visible and the temporal, even beyond the knowable and the graspable, something that is in fact beyond language to define.

Second is the anthropological truth about human nature: Just as objective morality is much more than it appears to be, so is subjective reality; so are we. We are capable of and destined for something like union with God, mystical experience, nirvana, satori, kensho, moksha, mukhti; an unending, unimaginable, inconceivable infinite ecstasy, something that eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man. If this is not quite the common teaching of all the world's religions, it is certainly the common teaching of all the mystics of all the world's religions.

Third is the ethical truth about morality: that the necessary way, the only way to this end, is moral. That morality is an absolute necessity. That you can't be happy unless you are good, even in this life. And you can't be happy in an otherworldly or godlike or heavenly way unless you are good in an



otherworldly or godlike or heavenly way. You can be more real than you think, and more good than you think. But these two things are intrinsically connected. A corollary would be an even deeper truth about love. All of the religions of the world rise to a morality that is beyond pragmatic survival, beyond rational justice and equality, even beyond mercy and forgiveness and compassion. They all rise to a morality in which the self must be decentered, in which we must get off the throne of our own lives. They tell us not merely that we must perform acts of generosity, but that we must die to ourselves, die to all selfishness and egotism, however respectable and proper and admired it may be. That we must be born again, radically changed. Christianity alone incarnates this love in God becoming man, and suffering and dying for love of us. But all the religions of the world have at least a precious glimpse of this high and holy ideal.

Fourth is the epistemological truth about the secret of wisdom: The secret of wisdom is gratitude. No one can be wise without it. Why? Because everything is a gift. Existence itself is a gift. That is why Islam — not the institutional religion, but the heart of the religion, namely, surrender, submission — propounds the heart of all true religion; we must surrender to the gift in order to receive it. We are not just children who need to mature, or students who need to learn, or patients who need to be healed, though we are all that, too; we are rebels who need to surrender. It is pride, greed, egotism, lust, the demand to control and to win, that makes us stupid.

Four Distinctively Christian Revelations

Next come four truths about man from specifically Christian wisdom. First is the metaphysical truth about man's origin as created in God's image. Jesus revealed a radical new name for God: Father. And he told us to call God our father, too. Like father, like son; that's what's meant by the image of God. And our origin determines our nature and our destiny. And our worth, and how we should be treated. In hospitals as well as in homes. Christianity answers the three most crucial questions about us: our origin, our nature, and our destiny. Or, to quote the title of a famous painting, where have we come from, what are we, where are we going. The first determines the other two. If we came only from dust, or random chance, or apes, then we are only dust, or random dust, or apes. And our destiny is only that of dust, or chance, or apes. And of course, then, it is only right and natural to treat people that way, because it's right to treat them as what they are.

What are people? Because we and Christ have a common father, we are his brothers, and each other's brothers. Because the origin of our being is the fatherhood of God, therefore all people are our family and Christ's family. More than that, they are Christ. They are organs in the body of Christ. Christ astonishingly tells us, "Whatever you do to one of the least of these my brethren, you do to me." And he precedes this point with the rabbinical formula "Verily, verily I say unto you," meaning, "You must take this in the strongest, most literal possible way. Do not water it down, nuance it, allegorize it, or patronizingly think it is an exaggeration to impress impressionable peasants without PhDs."

Second is the anthropological truth about man's nature as fallen and redeemed. According to Christianity, we are both much worse and much better than we think we are. Christian novelists like Dostoyevsky and Dickens, Tolstoy and Tolkien typically stretch our minds amazingly both up and down, to enter heavens and hells. Merely optimistic and merely pessimistic anthropologies are both left in the dust by this paradox. They are equally simplistic, and any anthropology that dully denies both of these extremes is doubly simplistic. If this is true, we should expect people to shock us, both



by their vices and by their virtues. Evil men can have amazingly hidden resources of goodness, and good men amazing hidden resources of evil. In great sufferings, man is capable of incredible heroism, and also of abject despair. Great sinners can become great saints, and great saints can commit great sins. The man Christ chose as his first pope and nicknamed the Rock, the apostle Peter, denied his Lord at His trial. And persecutor Saul became the apostle Paul, the greatest evangelist.

Third is the ethical truth about man's ultimate end, and destiny, and supreme good. It is to become not just a good man, but a son of God, something so glorious that if we saw it now we would fall down and worship it. John Paul the Great used to repeat his two favorite quotations from Vatican II, "Jesus Christ is the meaning of man," and "Jesus Christ alone reveals man to himself." The first means that Christ reveals what we must become, our ultimate end and destiny: we must become Christ. We must become not just imitators of Christ, but incorporated into Christ, organs in his body. He told us, "You must be perfect even as my Father in heaven is perfect." That's why purgatory exists. God will not rest until we have attained the high destiny of perfect holiness. That's what he's designed us for. Like a good human father, God is easy to please, but very hard to satisfy. And that Christ reveals man to himself means that because Christ is perfect man as well as perfect God, he alone shows us ourselves perfectly, as well as shows us God perfectly.

In other words, in Christ nothing is held back; there's nothing more. And God and ourselves are the only two persons that we absolutely need to know, because they're the only two persons that we're never ever able to escape for a single second, either in time or eternity. All persons are eternal, destined for eternity, either for eternal holiness or eternal horror. As C. S. Lewis memorably put it, "There are no ordinary people; you have never met a mere mortal." Nations, arts, cultures, and civilizations — these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals that we work with, play with, marry, snub or exploit. Immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. And all day long we are helping each other to one or the other of these two destinies.

Why do we treat persons differently than we treat animals? Well, unless we are either vegetarians or cannibals, we eat animals and not persons. But why? Because persons are destined for eternity, not just death. You see, a difference in destiny means a difference in value. Imagine two horses. They're identical twins. One is a gift to the king, and will pull the king's chariot during his coronation or his wedding. The other is destined for the glue factory, or the sausage factory. We treat things differently that have different destinies. When we suffer and when we enjoy, when we get sick and when we get well, when we are born and when we die, we're always moving. We're on a road, and every step on the road gets its meaning from the road's end. It's true we are to live in the present, but it's also true that we must live in the future. That's what hope means: believing in the future, not just in the present.

For even when the road takes dark turns, it is a road to heaven or hell. And if that is not true, then our faith is the biggest lie ever told. It's like a woman going through pregnancy and labor pains without there being a baby. Death is the biggie, as Woody Allen calls it. The big enemy, whether in bodies, or souls, or cultures, and Jesus turned death inside out, made death glorious and triumphant, for through its portals we enter into the presence of the living God. Death is the consequence of sin, and the last enemy. But it's also the door to heaven. So Christians hate death much more, and they fear it much less, than anyone else does. They hate it more and fight it more because Christ did. And they fear it less because Christ conquered it. Without both of these transformations, we do not yet have the Christian attitude towards death. Christianity changes everything, because everything is either life or death, and Christianity changes both life and death.



There is also an epistemological truth about the secret of wisdom in Christianity. The secret of wisdom is love. Because love is the nature of God, of ultimate reality, love goes all the way up. And the reason is that God is a Trinity, not just one person who loves, but complete love itself: the lover, the beloved, and the loving. Now this is a point in epistemology because love is not only good ethics, but also the secret of wisdom. The reason why God understands you perfectly, the reason why he is omniscient, is that he loves you perfectly. That's true for God as well as for us. The eye of the heart, the eye of love, is the profoundest, wisest eye of all. As Pascal says, the heart has its reasons that the reason does not know. The heart is not just feeling; it's seeing. There's an eye in it. And the reason that's true for us is that it's true for the God in whose

image we are made. Just as only the human being who loves you really understands you, so with God. He understands you only because he loves you. It follows that we can understand him only by loving him. That's what Jesus said when the Pharisees asked him how they could understand his teaching, and he replied, "If your will were to do the will of my Father, you would understand my teaching." The heart, the will, the spiritual organ that loves, is the source of understanding. That's why simple saints like Mother Teresa are profound and brilliant, and scholarly theologians can be such idiots.

Four Uniquely Catholic Teachings

Finally, four truths about man from specifically Catholic wisdom. Christianity is the world's most material religion, the most embodied, because of its central dogma that God not only created all matter and declared it good, and not only made us, his children, to be material creatures, but he even incarnated himself in it. And because the ascension was not the undoing of the incarnation, God has a human nature, body and soul, forever. With regard to matter, Catholic Christianity is to Christianity what Christianity is to religion in general. So the following four points are specifically Catholic, typically Catholic, because they emphasize the holiness of matter. But all four of them are not exclusively Catholic, for I find that many Protestants also believe them, in various degrees. And sometimes more deeply than many Catholics do.

The first is the metaphysical truth about the Church as the body of Christ. From this truth every other distinctively Catholic dogma follows, in the sense that Catholics believe all the distinctively Catholic and non-Protestant things that they do believe, not because they've figured each one out by itself, but because the Church teaches it. And the Church is Christ's body. He said to his apostles, "He who hears you hears me." And in saying so to the apostles, he said so implicitly to their successors, the bishops whom they ordained. They are still among us. And I call this a metaphysical truth, a truth about being, because it says that God, the supreme being, ultimate reality, is here with us now in his ecclesial body, the visible Catholic Church. When we say that the Church is Christ's body, the word is not a metaphor, like the body politic. It is a real body, and its members are organs of this body, not members of a political party. The Church is visible because Christ is visible.

In fact, the Church is Christ as your body is you. You do not have your body; you are your body. Christ does not have the Church; Christ is the Church. Your body is not your corporation, or your prison house, or your instrument, or your house, or your slave, or your machine; it is you. The Church is not Christ's corporation, or prison, or instrument, or house, or slave, or machine; it is him. He is not its CEO, or prison warden, or machine operator, or property tenant, or slave master, or machinist; he is her head, and she is his body. She is his bride, and he is her husband, and the essential formula



for marriage is that the two become one flesh, one body, one person, and one embodied person. That truth is not refuted by the sins and scandals of the Church's members. In fact, that's what makes those sins and scandals so horribly sinful and scandalous. Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians that when they have sex with prostitutes, they make Jesus Christ have sex with prostitutes. It's that shocking and that literal. Read it. It's in the book. Even when the Church looks like a slum, Christ is not its absentee landlord. What you, as physicians and nurses, are is extensions of God's love to the world, restoring life out of love of life.

In other words, it's God who raises you up, just as he raises up missionaries and preachers and priests and popes. You don't just imitate his work, you do his work, just as they do. And when you heal, you don't just heal bodies, you heal persons, embodied persons. Bodies are not hotel rooms for souls. When I slap your face, or kiss your face, I slap you, or kiss you. Healing your body is healing you. Fixing your house is not fixing you. But fixing your foot is fixing you.

The second distinctively Catholic truth is the epistemological truth about how we can know God. Since God is a person, in fact, three persons, rather than a concept, we know him by contact, not by concept, by what the Germans call *kennen*, not *wissen*. Or by what the French call *connaître*, not *savoir*, a knowing that is a touching, and this means the sacraments. For that is how God touches us. That is where he touches our very life, literally and physically. We know God by concepts, too; that's what the creeds do. They correct our false concepts. But the sacraments correct something deeper: our lived isolation. The Church teaches that Christ established seven sacraments and that they all work objectively; the formula is "ex opere operato" ("from the operation of the operator"), which means not impersonal magic, a kind of spiritual technology, but by God's objectively real personal presence and power in them. Just as I am in my slap or in my kiss, God is in his sacraments. There are also many sacramentals, like icons and holy water, and above all the Bible, which can also mediate his real presence physically. Though they do not work *ex opere operato* because they are not a permanent, personal divine presence always, and because they work through the subjective faith that they elicit in the heart of the believer and the user, rather than through themselves. But they, too, also mediate God's real presence.

And we find sacramentals everywhere. Unlike sacraments, sacramentals have no clear borders. Anything material, like a Christmas present given out of love, can become a sacramental.

A human touch can mediate not just your love but Christ's love. And it can do that even when it is indirect, when the touch is mediated by complex technology, because there's a human touch at its source. If you touch another person with your prosthetic limb, or your scalpel, or your forceps, it is you who do the touching, not just the limb or the instrument. Our technology is like our own prosthetic limbs. You use a scalpel as a sharpened fingernail, or a forceps as an extended pair of fingers. All this resembles, in various degrees, the Eucharist, the archetypal sacrament, the most perfect sacrament. The most complete and perfect presence of Christ in this life is not an out-of-the-body experience, but an in-the-body experience. The most complete and intimate way you can know God, actually touch God, is not in any mystical experience, but in receiving the Eucharist. Even if you don't feel it, every time you receive holy communion you do something angels would envy if they were capable of the sin of envy, something that exceeds the greatest mystical experience of the greatest mystics of all time in its objective perfection and intimacy, though not in subjective feeling. God doesn't give you a mystical high when you receive the Eucharist, because he doesn't want you to get a spiritual sweet tooth, and fall in love with the feeling rather than with him. It's training.



One very practical consequence of this doctrine of the Eucharist concerns death, and the approach of death and the fear of death. When you receive the last rites, the viaticum, and die in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and in the presence of Christ in the Church, that is, your family and friends who are also Christ's family and friends, you die with Christ, on his cross with him, and then you see that the cross, like the man on it, is incredibly different than what it looks like. It is a rocket ship to heaven. Just as you'd rather be in love in Detroit than divorced in Hawaii, you'd rather be on the hell of the cross with him than in heaven without him. Apologies to Michiganers. The very essence of heaven is the presence of Christ. He makes the worst thing into the best thing. So that the word we use for the day that saw the most evil, most horrible thing that ever happened in history is Good Friday.

Third comes the central anthropological truth in Catholicism, the truth about the body, and bodily life as holy. Tertullian said, "The flesh is the hinge of salvation." If Christ had not physically shed his blood, we could not be saved. If the woman with the life-long hemorrhage had touched the garment not of Christ but of one of Christ's apostles in the press of the crowd, she would not have been healed. Christ came to us in the body, and continues to come to us through others' bodies. He was conceived and born and lived and died and resurrected and will return in the body, and he now saves us through bodies. Therefore, healing bodies is also healing souls. It's not like repairing cars, but repairing drivers. It is healing something eternal, something that will be raised and recognizable. As Doubting Thomas saw His wounds, I think you will see in heaven the scars from the healing operations you performed on your patients in this life, and I think those scars will be made not of blood but of gold, like badges of honor.

Finally, my fourth distinctively Catholic truth is the ethical truth about the deeper meaning of sex. The sexual revolution is today the single most important revolution in our time, for it concerns not only certain areas of life, like politics or war, but the origin of life itself. Sex is the one area where almost all the conflicts and controversies rage. The area where the culture of death and the culture of life conflict the most. What kind of a difference does a Christian anthropology make to your understanding of human sexuality and the sexual revolution? Well, I'd say the same kind of difference it makes to be awake or asleep. But that's going to take more time than I have left in this talk.



Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi
“The Future of Humanity: New Challenges to Anthropology”

Introduction

We are living through a period of profound social and cultural change. Previous plenary assemblies have studied these changes by focusing on the new languages and grammars of communication (2010), youth and new emerging cultures (2013), new forms of participation of women in culture (2015). The deepest transformations, however, do not regard any particular aspect of society, but rather what it means to be human; fundamental anthropological questions are in play. To announce the Gospel to people today, the Church must present its ideas in ways that are culturally accessible and credible.

The *general aim of the Plenary is to open up a dialogue about the future of humanity*, looking at some fundamental questions such as the concept of human nature, the relation between mind and body, the role of the person in a society of intelligent machines. These are some of the themes we believe deserve our close attention. In fact, among other things, recent decades have seen extraordinary scientific developments that have a direct impact on the self-understanding of the human person, in particular, in the fields of genetics, neuroscience and artificial intelligence. These developments have the power to transform radically many aspects of human life and they oblige us to think again about how we understand human health and well-being, both physical and psychological; about our comprehension of human responsibility and free will; and about the emergence of machines capable of using types of intelligence, language capacities and reasoning powers that we would have previously considered as being exclusive to human beings. These developments call not only for moral evaluation, but, more radically, they require us to re-examine the ethical and anthropological categories traditionally used to make such value judgments.

One aim of the plenary is *to understand better the cultural contexts* where these developments are emerging. To this end, there will be a presentation of the state of scientific research on these issues, outlining potential applications of recent scientific discoveries and technological innovations as well as their likely impact on areas such as medicine and healthcare, economics and business, politics and social policy.

At a deeper level we must try to understand the aims, objectives and motivations of those who promote scientific research so as to engage with them and address the philosophical and anthropological presuppositions underlining their understanding of what it means to be human, and the conception of human life and society that is influencing the direction of their research. This is important in a world where research is globalized and not everyone shares the same cultural and ethical traditions. These suppositions and conceptions are often implicit rather than articulated, and yet they are the fundamental premises which, whether acknowledged or not, actually determine approaches to ethics. Unless we examine these deeper convictions and subject them to critical reflection, much of our ethical discourse is likely to remain superficial and unlikely to create consensus and agreement.

A second objective of the plenary is to encourage a multiplicity of research approaches and an inter-disciplinary synthesis so that different points of view on these issues can illuminate each other. This will serve to promote an awareness that the questions about the future of humanity and the impact of science and technology need the attention of a wider public and cannot be left exclusively to the scientists. In fact, it is not only a matter of judging the developments in research, but of establishing criteria to decide the orientation scientific research should have, not basing itself



exclusively on technical or economic criteria. Such an interdisciplinary approach will help us avoid what Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* calls the *technocratic paradigm*, which makes the method and aims of science and technology the exclusive epistemological paradigm that shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society. Such a paradigm generates a reductionist or unidimensional approach to life and needs to be complemented with the insights of other forms of wisdom. This implies a cultural approach that could foster “a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality” (*Laudato Si'*, 111).

This approach combines analysis, critical evaluation and pastoral response and aims to create a situation where believers feel entitled and welcome to bring the insights of their traditions to such discussions: “We need to develop a new synthesis capable of overcoming the false arguments of recent centuries. Christianity, in fidelity to its own identity and the rich deposit of truth that it has received from Jesus Christ, continues to reflect on these issues in fruitful dialogue with changing historical situations. In doing so, it reveals its eternal newness” (*Laudato Si'*, 121).

Important questions to be considered include the following: How can we establish whether progress truly respects human dignity? Who will determine what are ethically objectionable or unsafe forms of research and experimentation? How will research be funded and who will own the intellectual and economic proprietary rights to new applications? These and similar questions are already receiving deserved attention from journalists, writers and film-makers and consequently have become themes in popular culture. In the context of the plenary, we hope to open up a deeper and more sustained dialogue on these themes, and to allow the more profound issues concerning human identity and the point and purpose of life, already being addressed by philosophers and theologians to surface and contribute to public discourse.

1. The Ground Map (Anthropological models)

For centuries, in the different religious and philosophical traditions, a clear answer was available to the question “What is man?” One knew what it was to be a human, and what it was that gave humanity its uniqueness and specificity in the world. In the current cultural context, this certainty dissolves and it is harder to give a response to the question of the identity of the human being.

In broader terms, it could be said that in the Western world, since ancient Greek times, the vision of the person has been built on the basis of a dual scheme: soul and body, subject-object. In some cases, as in the platonic model, this dual scheme becomes a veritable dualism; in others, such as the Aristotelian model, the two distinct realities are integrated. The Church has followed Aristotle’s dual model, with Thomas Aquinas reformulating it to speak of the human person, of our capacities, and of our destiny after death. This model – rooted in an integrated biblical anthropology – brought about the development of fundamental concepts such as the individuality of the person, autonomy, personal responsibility, and inalienable dignity.

Oriental philosophical traditions, on the other hand, have generally underlined the holistic and “Unitarian” dimension of the human person and our interconnection with the rest of nature. Eastern thought, even with its diversities, tends to consider the human person from a relational point of view. Internal equilibrium, harmony with nature, and continuity between matter and spirit are ever-present elements in this vision.

New currents of thought bring into discussion concepts that seemed to have been settled once and for all, such as the distinction between the sexes, the relation of paternity and maternity, the dignity



of each person, personal responsibility for our actions, immortality, the uniqueness and superiority of humans over animals. Moreover, new technological possibilities are radically modifying these assumptions and opening up new possibilities.

For some, humanity is coming closer to a turning point (or has reached it already!), an overtaking of its own species thanks to the new technological possibilities. They welcome these as the dawn of a new horizon for humanity. For others, these social and cultural changes are catastrophic and are incompatible with a Christian vision.

A task of the plenary will be that of outlining the anthropological models underlying, often inexplicitly, the new ideologies and cultural models, studying them and their dynamics and hidden influences. This will permit us to trace a sort of map of anthropological models, those of the past and those of the future. Only in this way can a moral evaluation be made examining the ethical problems that such cultural currents pose.

In this context, it is a question of understanding how to continue speaking of a distinction between body (matter) and soul (spirit) or of responsibility, dignity, immortality, and eternity, in a way that is meaningful to our contemporaries. Finally, it is a question of understanding how these issues affect the pastoral life of communities and individuals and what pastoral responses can be offered.

2. Redesigning Human Nature (Medicine and Genetics)

From the seventh century onward, an articulated reflection developed on *nature* that was assumed by Christianity as one of its basic concepts and would define a certain type of Western sensitivity. The concept of nature had two distinct meanings. It indicated the unity of those things that are natural, or subject to an order, a rule, and the normal process of the laws of nature; and secondly, it delineated the essential properties and specific causes of individual things.

By defining nature as the intrinsic and final principle of movement and of rest present in itself, primarily and not accidentally (*Physics*, II, 1, 192b), Aristotle traced an important conceptual path. This allowed Christianity to follow placing the discourse on nature within the horizon of the first cause, which is understood in a supernatural sense. Nature, then, would not be a consequence of casual material processes, but would have its own foundation in the Absolute Being (Creator), who is its guarantor in the order of existence and essence. Nature, then, took on deterministic traits in as much as it had a precise order that depended from the will of God. In this perspective, the human being was also placed in close relationship to the Creator and subject to his divine plan.

At this time, there is no longer a unique model of nature that is shared universally, either by philosophers or those of the world of technology and science. In fact, from the sixteenth century onward the vision of nature has undergone a gradual transformation, appearing ever more chaotic and disordered. At the same time the belief has emerged that control is needed to obtain the maximum benefit in the absolute interest of human beings. This has paved the way not only to a desire to look “inside” things and “inside” nature to better understand them, but also in order to control and modify them.

This evolution of the understanding of nature brought with it a consequent redefinition of humans and their essential characteristics. Looking “inside” the biology of the living organisms led to the discovery of DNA, which allowed us to uncover the complexity of cell processes. At the same time, studies of DNA indicated that it is an essential, but not rigid, element; it is flexible to the point that it can be modified.



Recent research in the sphere of applied biology notably accelerates and expands the possibilities of genetic engineering. This can be seen in the development of tools for genetic editing such as CRISPR/Cas9. The modifications of DNA can serve different purposes. Some research aims at eliminating diseases but genetic engineering can also be used to improve or enhance the human genotype radically. Supporters of this latter idea imagine the human being to be a new edition, updated and strengthened, marking a new frontier in the history of humanity expressed in so-called transhumanism (which uses science and technology to improve physical and cognitive abilities to overcome undesirable aspects of the human condition) or post-humanism (a successive step in human evolution thanks to the bio- and nanotechnologies.)

From the anthropological and cultural perspectives, many issues are raised by the effort to manipulate DNA and create a stronger new genotype. There is the question of “speciation.” Will strengthened human beings still be part of the species *homo sapiens*? Will there be new inequalities created between those who belong to the enhanced species and those that remain “normal?” What will be the new species’ identity, social status, bond of belonging, and validity of ethical reference?

Finally, all these anthropological questions invite theological reflection: What is the meaning of these mutations within the salvific plan of God? Are interventions by humans at the heart of life and on human beings part of the task of safeguarding and co-creation assigned to humans by God? Are they an abuse, an expression of our hubris in seeking to substitute God? How can these things be integrated in a coherent theological vision that helps pastors and the faithful?

3. The human person, the brain and the soul (Neurosciences)

In ancient times, the human was considered to be a microcosm, not on the basis of in-depth scientific study, but rather on the basis of an intuition and philosophical and theological ideas. Today more than ever this definition could be recovered, albeit with some clarifications and limiting the application of this term to one single organ, the brain.

Most of the questions coming from the neurosciences go in two directions. The first is functional: in what way does the biological-physiological strata describe and govern the human person? The second, of a more philosophical character, asks in what way the human being can be identified exclusively as the brain and how far can we go in thinking of the human being as being determined by the brain.

Concretely, there are many problems today that are receiving attention from the neuro-cognitive sciences: the relationship of mind and body, the origin of religiosity, the phenomena of biological/physiological determination of the brain, the significance of human activities such as choosing, feeling and believing; the implications of discoveries about the neuronal bases of knowledge, and the question of freewill. These issues raise fundamental questions of human identity.

We need to consider the extent to which many of our basic human capacities are the results of molecular and chemical processes at work in the brain. This raises the question of which functions of the brain are to be considered most significant. Should we focus on functions that are reflexive, where the brain responds to impulses from the outside, or intrinsic functions, concerning the maintaining of information for interpretation, response, and even prediction of environmental impulses? These issues go to the heart of human understanding that is the object of scientific research and invite us to consider to what extent this knowledge can be harmonized with the anthropology of our Christian tradition.

4. In the society of intelligent machines (Artificial Intelligence) The fourth working session



focuses on the impact of the so-called “digitalization” on the future of humanity. In particular, this session will examine the potential of developments in *machine learning* and artificial intelligence to transform or – to use the vocabulary of these sectors – to “disrupt” the established patterns of human behavior and activity.

It is already clear that the “third machine age” and progress in robotics have consequences in the mechanization of administrative, bureaucratic and production tasks that previously were envisaged as capable of being performed only by humans. What does this mean for the future of work? How will those who lose traditional types of employment find value and purpose in their lives? Do such developments inevitably lead to a growth in social and economic inequality between those who will develop, program and own such machines and those who will be displaced from their workplaces?

As machines develop, they are becoming increasingly autonomous. Self-driving cars, automated weapons systems are already well advanced. How can such autonomous systems be programmed in terms of decisional processes? What ethical capacities can be programmed into the algorithms that seek to anticipate potential scenarios and determine best responses? Who will ultimately be legally and ethically responsible for the actions of such machines?

There is a growing concern about the development of *artificial general intelligence* or *strong AI*, where the systems are programmed not just to perform repetitive tasks, but also to obtain a form of real autonomy. It is a matter of developing the ability of machines to re-program themselves with a view to attaining a “self-consciousness” equivalent to the concept of a mind, but remaining distinct from the processes of human thought. These concerns have been raised by writers and film-makers, but they have also drawn the attention of scientists. Stephen Hawking has warned that “the development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race. Once humans develop artificial intelligence, it will take off on its own and redefine itself at an ever-increasing rate. Humans, who are limited by slow biological evolution, couldn’t compete and will be superseded.”

Others, more optimistically, embrace the possibility of artificial intelligence and technology leading to the emergence of a new forms of super-intelligence and a point of *singularity* – *the accelerating progress of technology and changes in the mode of human life give the appearance of drawing closer to some essential singularity in the history of the human race, beyond which human affairs cannot continue as we know them*. Some support transhumanism, which looks to science to use new technologies, genetics and neuroscience to transform the physical and intellectual capacities of humans to escape our natural conditions and limitations, to the point of being possible to speak of the emergence of posthuman beings. Some see a fusion between human beings and machines: this is a matter of implanting chips to strengthen the memory and augment intelligence of the subject (*cyborgs*) or to “download” the brain, considered as the center of the personality and identity of the individual, on a digital system, where biological limits can be overcome.

5. Aims and method of the Plenary

The scenarios set out above – new anthropological models, the possibility of transforming the body offered by medicine and genetics, new ethical challenges from the neurosciences, and social and anthropological transformations from the development of machines – would until recently have seemed to belong to the realm of fantasy and fiction. Now they have been partially realized, and pose immediate challenges for the theology and the pastoral work of the Church. In order to be of service of the broader Church community we wish to make a leap of imagination to seek to understand how



the world of the future might be and how we could respond to the deepest questions of the men and women who will live in that world, and to some extent are already living in that world.



John Allen

“Where does Catholic thinking on ‘gender theory’ go from here?” (March 15, 2018)

ROME - Most of the time when Pope Francis speaks on a social or political concern, one understands immediately what he’s talking about. When the pontiff addresses poverty, for instance, or threats to the environment, or a “throw-away culture” that disregards the unborn, there aren’t many hoops to jump through to get the point.

Not so, however, when Francis addresses another frequent hobby horse: “Gender theory.”

Though that term has been in use in Vatican circles for at least the last quarter-century, reaching back to the era of St. Pope John Paul II, concern over it has intensified on Francis’s watch.

In a nutshell, it refers to theories which posit that male/female identities are not given in nature but rather socially and culturally constructed, and therefore can be revised based on one’s personal desires.

In an October 2015 general audience, Francis warned that with the rise of gender theory, “we risk going backward,” saying it “drains the world of affection and obscures the heavens of hope.” A year later, while returning to Rome after a trip to Georgia and Azerbaijan, Francis complained of what he called “indoctrination in gender theory” occurring in schools around the world.

Last October, in a session with the Pontifical Academy for Life, the pontiff said the “recently introduced hypothesis” of gender theory is “not fair,” and warned that it’s “likely to dismantle the source of energy that nourishes the alliance of man and woman and makes it creative and fruitful.”

Francis clearly thinks there’s something worrying, and if there’s one thing Rome as a company town knows how to do, it’s to pick up on it when the boss is worried. Thus it’s little surprise that a March 12-13 conference at Rome’s Opus Dei-run Santa Croce University on “The Right to Education and to Teaching” included a paper on gender theory, during a panel chaired by German Archbishop Georg Gänswein, the closest aide to Pope emeritus Benedict XVI and the Prefect of the Papal Household for Francis.

In the wake of the presentation, two things seemed clear. The first is that it was a deft presentation of the state of affairs in Europe, and the Church’s current thinking about it. The second was that for the reflection about gender theory to go forward, the conversation eventually may need to be broadened.

The paper was prepared by Vincenzo Turchi, a professor of canon law and ecclesiastical law at the University of Salento in southern Italy, though it was read on his behalf on March 12 after Turchi suffered an accident and was unable to travel.

In general, when Vatican personnel over the years decry the rise of “gender theory,” they’re not really referring to a specific theory associated with a given thinker. Instead, they mean a broad intellectual and cultural push, which they see as posing three interrelated risks:

- Eroding the idea that sexual identity and orientation are given in nature, proposing that orientation, and, by extension, sexual behavior, isn’t bound by objective moral norms but rather the result of contingent historical and cultural choices.
- Encouraging the state to promote such a vision of gender in schools, thereby threatening the right of parents to be the primary educators of their children.
- Under the guise of avoiding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, stigmatizing traditional religious and moral views and ending up becoming itself a form of discrimination.



All three of those points were struck in Turchi's presentation on Monday.

Gender theory, Turchi said, is based on "well-known philosophical and anthropological concepts," beginning with "the primacy of culture over nature." According to this view, he said, natural data are seen as "marginal," so sexual differences are "inessential and changeable," to be shaped on the basis of "individual self-determination."

Today, Turchi said, gender theory is being introduced in schools in various ways, including not only courses in sexual education but in many other subjects, such as a controversial citizenship program in Spanish primary schools.

Though often presented as a way of preventing discrimination and bullying against LGBTQI youth in schools, Turchi argued, materials shaped by gender theory actually go much further.

"It's not limited to presenting principles of non-discrimination, but it anticipates marriage for people of the same sex, or registration for same-sex couples, as well as adoption rights for them and so on," he said.

"It's not the same as equal rights for same-sex people," Turchi wrote.

Turchi then reviewed cases from Spain, France and Italy to illustrate what he sees as the dynamics of implementing gender theory in European schooling today. The French case pivoted on a teaching program called *ABCD of Equality* program, jointly developed by the Women's and Education ministries and launched in September 2013.

Designed to help children overcome negative gender stereotypes, critics say in reality it blurred male/female distinctions. In acting out fairy tales, for instance, boys were encouraged to play the part of Little Red Riding Hood, and girls the part of the wolf. In looking at the Renoir painting *Madame Charpentier et ses enfants*, the government suggested teachers point out that little boys, as well as little girls, used to wear dresses, or that King Louis XIV wore high heels and ribbons.

Schools selected to pilot the program were targeted by angry parental protests and boycotts, including many Catholic parents, who asserted the state was overstepping its bounds, wading into territory of values and identity that belong to families and parents.

Turchi cited analogous developments in northern Europe, including the adoption of "gender-neutral" pronouns in Swedish schools and the adoption of sexual education materials in Denmark that include the possibility for guest speakers such as a transsexual prostitute, without the possibility that parents could opt to hold their child back from that lesson.

Surveying the landscape, Turchi said, there's a sense of "bitter disappointment," because in discussing gender theory, "we're on very slippery ground."

"It's being spread without speaking about it openly, inserted into legislation and then into school materials on other subjects," he said. "Anyone who objects is labeled as racist or discriminatory."

"Authentic justice today," he said, "may require swimming against the tide."

As a footnote to the March 12 discussion, it seemed clear that resolving the tensions posed by gender theory involves a complicated intersection of law and policy, and probably will require having everyone with a stake in the discussion sit down and try to figure things out.

In that regard, it was striking that the lineup for the conference not only was composed almost entirely of male clerics, but it didn't seem to include anyone who might be sympathetic to some of the ideas behind gender theory. Probably this wasn't the venue, but one suspects that eventually, that conversation will have to take place.



Benjamin Vail, “The Battle over the Sexes: Catholic Perspectives on the Gender Debate”

Quia parvus error in principio magnus est in fine.

(“A small error at the outset can lead to great errors in the final conclusions.”)

– St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*

By now, most people have heard the common saying, “Men are from Mars, women are from Venus,” popularized by the book by John Gray in the 1990s. That God created men and women with equal human dignity but distinct and complementary natures is a perennial teaching of the Catholic Church, but today’s society is becoming increasingly untethered from this eternal truth, leading to great confusion over the relationship between the sexes and a misguided politics that threatens to undermine civilization. As Catholics, what should we know about this debate, and what resources are available to keep us grounded in reality? Are men and women really from different planets?

Battling metaphors

To answer these questions I want to focus on the provocative writings of Occidental College sociology professor Lisa Wade, a feminist sexologist who promotes radical gender equality at her influential blog “Sociological Images.” Her views are representative of a strand of gender theory that is widespread both in academia and popular culture. (As an aside, maybe I should mention that Prof. Wade and I were classmates in the sociology graduate program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the early 2000s.)

Contrary to John Gray, in her popular and academic writing Prof. Wade advances the notion that “men are from North Dakota, women are from South Dakota”—in other words, sex differences are mostly a social construction and are not grounded in significant biological differentiation. This new metaphor has its origins in the work of Kathryn Dindia, a professor of communications, who has written:

“Men and women are not from different planets or different cultures, and they do not speak different languages. Men and women are from the same planet, the same culture; they communicate by using the same language. Indeed, the empirical research indicates that the average man is not that much different from the average woman. For many communicative, social psychological, and psychological variables, sex differences are small, and approximately 85% of men and women overlap in their scores on these variables. Men are not from Mars, women are not from Venus. The metaphor that more accurately represents the differences between men and women is that men are from North Dakota, women are from South Dakota.”

Competing visions of human nature

What is the implication of this notion, which I will call “the Dakotas metaphor?” Simply put, the implication is that if men and women are basically the same, there is no justification for any sex-based differentiation in society. In other words, men and women should be treated perfectly equally. This raises the question: are men and women really so indistinguishable?

As Robert R. Reilly told *Catholic World Report*, today’s gender debate shows that there are two fundamentally opposed views of reality duking it out in the culture. Starting from different



understandings of human nature, they end up at completely different conclusions about sex differences. The first view, consistent with Catholic teaching, is that all things have an inherent nature that makes them what they are. Reilly explains:

“In other words, things have inbuilt purposes. We don’t get to make them up; it is what makes them what they are in reality. They are a given. Reality exists without our permission. When we discover what something is for according to its Nature, our job is to conform ourselves to its purposes—including to the purposes we have according to our human Nature. According to Aristotle, this is how we achieve happiness—through virtuous actions.”

The second view is that “things are nothing in themselves, but only what we make them to be according to our wills and desires. We no longer have to conform ourselves to reality, but can conform reality to ourselves. ... Therefore, we can make everything, including ourselves, anything that we wish and that we have the power to do. This is the modern project.”

According to Prof. Wade, lack of biological differentiation, or “dimorphism,” between human males and females means that we are basically interchangeable. There is no human nature, which means we can structure social institutions, such as the family, schools, the tax code, and the Constitution, with the intention of engineering a new society that levels all inequalities. The differences we observe today are the products of outdated traditions and dysfunctional cultural conventions—they are “social constructs.” Thus, if we would stop focusing on our differences, and instead manipulate social conditions to eliminate inequality, we can eliminate gender discrimination and other injustices.

The Dakotas Perspective

Prof. Wade asserts that the biological is the social, in the sense that the social environment impacts biological development, and concepts of “male” and “female” are social constructions. She admits that there is some inescapable materiality to the human body, but we should not think of it as deterministic. Our humanity—our bodies, our ideas, our behavior—are determined by our social surroundings, and so there is practically no given meaning or significance to our biology. The body could perhaps be thought of as the wooden frame holding the (practically blank) writing slate of the mind—the so-called Enlightenment’s infamous *tabula rasa*.

In a popular article titled “Sex Shocker! Men and Women Aren’t that Different,” Prof. Wade laments that Americans “obsess over gender differences”:

“But we’re not *that* different. We’re just not that kind of species. It’s kind of amazing when you think about it. We face a great deal of pressure to be different. We live in a world in which “men are from Mars and women are from Venus” is a household phrase and a publishing empire. Despite these influences, scholars find either no difference or only very small differences on 78% of traits, abilities, interests, attitudes, and behaviors.”

I call for a more reasoned conversation. “Opposite sexes” is obviously a misnomer. The phrase suggests that men and women are fundamentally dissimilar, with contrasting strengths and weaknesses. In fact, if we have to choose between arguing that we are exactly the same and totally different, we have to go with the former. We are much more alike than we are different. Instead of plowing forward with the differences debate, I’d like to see us give more ink to our similarities and spend more energy appreciating just how much we have in common.



While giving lip service to biological realities by acknowledging that hormones, brain structure, body morphology, and genes may distinguish men from women, Prof. Wade minimizes physical difference and emphasizes social construction. In an academic article, she claims that “it makes no sense to talk about ‘human nature.’” We can become whatever we want to be: “The idea that some features of our biology are overwhelmingly immutable, difficult or impossible to change, is no longer a tenable position. . . . This is not to say that research into the biological bases of gender is useless, but to point out that we are mistaken if we think that such research is going to offer us a bright, bold line between the two categories. In other words, we should not expect to find clear cut sex differences in our biologies, even if some differences exist.” She continues:

“Perhaps the most important thing to understand when approaching contemporary research on sex differences and similarities is that men and women are overwhelmingly alike. When we consider the full range of biological adaptations to sexual reproduction, humans are not particularly sexually dimorphic. Some species show dramatic differences between males and females in appearance; we do not. Moreover, because we are not particularly dimorphic in appearance, we should expect significant overlap in our abilities and interests, considering that morphological sexual dimorphism correlates with divisions of labor.”

What is especially sinister, in the view of Prof. Wade and activists like her, is the way that elites use sexual dimorphism to rationalize unequal treatment of the sexes (i.e., the oppression of women). The rejection of dimorphism is intended to undermine the claim that men and women are different, and thereby effect a revolution against a system that treats men and women differently:

“If we can show that biology is neither the source of inequality nor neutral in its effects but is, instead, harnessed by the forces of inequality and exploited by the powerful to their own advantage, then oppression is not just an abstract force—whether ideological, economic, or structural—but one that imposes cognitive limitations, manipulates our chemistries, and activates or suppresses our genetic potential. What is new here is not the observation that bodies have been interpreted in ways that serve the interests of elites—of this we have long been aware...—but that the oppression goes far beyond interpretation; it violates our bodily boundaries in something more akin to occupation. When control of our societies are [sic] in the hands of the few, so are our bodies.”

The view that men and women have given differences is anathema for Prof. Wade, for it leads to oppression. The widespread internalization of the idea of sexual difference has insidious effects on our personal relationships. She writes on her **blog**, “Heterosexuality in the U.S. is gendered: women are expected to attract, men are supposed to be attracted. Men want, women want to be wanted. Metaphorically, this is a predator/prey type relationship.”

In fact, in another popular article, Prof. Wade explicitly states that the goal of minimizing or denying sexual differences is to eradicate injustice:

“Generally speaking, men and women today live extraordinarily similar lives. We grow up together, go to the same schools, and have the same jobs. Outside of dating—for some of us—and making babies, gender really isn’t that important in our real, actual, daily lives. . . . But if there were no gender difference, there couldn’t be gender inequality; one group can’t be widely believed to be superior to the other unless there’s an Other.”

Affirming the gender binary also makes everyone who doesn’t fit into it invisible or problematic. This is, essentially, all of us. Obviously it’s a big problem for people who don’t identify as male or female or for those whose bodies don’t conform to their identity, but it’s a problem for the rest of us,



too. Almost every single one of us takes significant steps every day to try to fit into this binary: what we eat, whether and how we exercise, what we wear, what we put on our faces, how we move and talk. All these things are gendered and when we do them in gendered ways we are forcing ourselves to conform to the binary.

The Catholic response

While Prof. Wade's concern for the mistreatment of women is praiseworthy, her attempt to fight injustice through ideologically motivated research and public commentary comes at the expense of the truth. Like her, faithful Catholics call for the just treatment of women within families and society at large, and for the promotion of human rights in general. The object of Catholic social teaching is a "civilization of love." But, unlike her, they do so based upon an accurate understanding of human nature and the purpose of life. It is easy to see that relationships between men and women are often fraught with conflict, exploitation, and misunderstanding—but this has its roots in the corruption of our nature through sin, and is not due simply to imperfect social structures.

Prof. Wade is right that men and women share many basic physical and mental traits, not to mention equal dignity as human beings. But the sexes are different in important ways due to human nature. God created men and women complementary to each other. In numerous writings, Pope St. John Paul II explains that the truth and goodness of sexual difference is stamped by God right into our physical bodies. Contrary to the assertions of Prof. Wade, Prof. Mary Healy says the human body is not an "empty signifier," but its morphology contains meaning within itself. In other words, the differences in male and female bodies reveal our complementary natures. We need each other. This is the starting point for learning the truth of male-female relations.

But the relationship between men and women is not reducible, as Prof. Wade suggests, to just our physical appearance. It must be understood at a deeper ontological level. Rather than necessarily resulting in competition or conflict because of our disparate strengths and weaknesses, acknowledging the distinction between men and women is the first step toward living out healthy, meaningful relationships and for personal flourishing—and ultimately, the giving and receiving of love. To try to deny the real differences between the sexes is to deny human nature, and to try to remake our sexuality according to human notions of justice or utility can only have negative consequences for individuals and society. Here we see the competing views of the human person—what it means to be human—in stark contrast. This is a debate over human nature, or perhaps even more fundamentally, whether something that can be called human nature even exists.

There is a great deal of scientific literature documenting significant biological differences between the sexes (see for example the books of Simon Baron-Cohen, Michael Gurian, Steven Rhoads, Leonard Sax, and Lewis Wolpert), but rather than engaging the debates over biochemistry and physiology I want to focus on what this discussion means for our understanding of anthropology—i.e., the philosophical and theological question of what it means to be human. Anyone with eyes can see that men and women are different, and not just in terms of secondary sex characteristics or women's unique ability to bear children. Even more profoundly, we can ask: how should we understand these differences, and what do they mean for our culture and public policy?

The Catholic Church is one of the few institutions that continue to defend a traditional view of male-female relations. This is one reason the Church draws the ire of academics and prominent politicians and cultural figures who share Prof. Wade's views. But rather than seeking to impose



patriarchal oppression, as is so often suggested in the media, the Church's teachings on human sexuality are remarkably sensitive and nuanced. There is a rich body of literature available to the faithful that explains and defends traditional Christian views on sex roles and gender, such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Pope St. John Paul II's theology of the body, and many papal encyclicals and other magisterial documents issued through the ages.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2333-2335) teaches: "Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. Physical, moral, and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out. ... Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way."

In *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988), Pope St. John Paul II lays out "the truth about the equality of man and woman." He writes, "One must speak of an essential 'equality,' since both of them—the woman as much as the man—are created in the image and likeness of God. ... The fact of being a man or a woman involves no limitation here ... *This unity does not cancel out diversity.*" He also warns against false notions of "women's liberation":

In the name of liberation from male "domination," women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine "originality." There is a well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not "reach fulfillment," but instead will *deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness*. It is indeed an enormous richness. ... The personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity: they are merely different. Hence a woman, as well as a man, must understand her "fulfillment" as a person, her dignity and vocation, on the basis of these resources, according to the richness of the femininity which she received on the day of creation and which she inherits as an expression of the "image and likeness of God" that is specifically hers.

In his *Letter to Women* (1995), the Pope talks about how to "achieve *real equality*" for women in social life. Such effort must be grounded in the truth that "woman complements man, just as man complements woman: men and women are *complementary*. Womanhood expresses the 'human' as much as manhood does, but in a different and complementary way. ... Womanhood and manhood are complementary *not only from the physical and psychological points of view*, but also from the *ontological*. It is only through the duality of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' that the 'human' finds full realization."

In contrast to Prof. Wade, the Pope does not see men and women by nature locked in a bitter struggle, or occupying predator-prey roles: "...woman and man are marked neither by a static and undifferentiated equality nor by an irreconcilable and inexorably conflictual difference. Their most natural relationship, which corresponds to the plan of God, is the 'unity of the two,' a relational 'un-duality,' which enables each to experience their interpersonal and reciprocal relationship as a gift which enriches and which confers responsibility" .

According to Pope St. John Paul II in his *Letter to Families* (1994), women will be "liberated," and the common good served, only when men and women make their equal but distinct contributions to family and community life, based on the unique gifts of masculinity and femininity endowed by God from the beginning. The Church has continued to develop its teaching on the reality of complementarity. Sister Prudence Allen, RSM, is an authority in this area, and has written a helpful introduction. Prof. Helen Alvaré recently discussed with *Catholic World Report* the "Humanum"



conference on complementarity sponsored by the Vatican in autumn 2014.

Catholic experts react to dimorphism metaphors

There are Catholics active in academia and the culture who seek to explain and draw attention to the Church's teachings on sexuality and complementarity. I asked some leading experts for their opinions about the Dakotas analogy to get a sense of how contemporary Catholics approach the gender debate and respond to this particular metaphor. Here are some of their answers.

Jennifer Roback Morse, Ph.D., founder and president of the Ruth Institute, replies: "Men are from Earth. Women are from Earth. We are the same species. The *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus* franchise has been wildly popular because it is a reaction to a peculiar form of feminism which has become the establishment view of feminism. I describe it this way: "Men and women are identical, except women are better." This view in some form or fashion has been promoted *ad nauseam* by the elites of American culture. Ordinary people are reacting to the obvious falsity of this view by giving their support to books like *Men are From Mars*."

Gabriele Kuby, author of the book *The Global Sexual Revolution: The Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*, writes: "A good metaphor should communicate the essence of some piece of reality in a way that transcends rational thought and appeals to the depth of intuitive perception. Jesus is the master in this field. The metaphor "Men are from North Dakota, women are from South Dakota" has no resonance in me. The sentence intends to convey that the differences between men and women are negligible. Can anyone distinguish people from North and South Dakota on first sight? Probably not."

The difference between man and woman can be recognized by every human being on this planet by looking at others and by looking at themselves. If an individual is uncertain or discontent with his or her gender, it is a severe identity disorder, listed on the official [Medical] diagnosis list ICD-10. Some of the differences between man and woman are genetic, others are social and changeable by historic and cultural factors. Whether a researcher is more interested in the aspects which are common to the human being or in the aspects which differ between man and woman on the biological, neurophysical, hormonal, psychological, social level seems to be highly determined by the degree of adaption of the researcher to the mainstream. Maturation of the human being can be described as overcoming self-centeredness by moving into fatherhood and motherhood.

It is difficult to find a metaphor for man and woman. We are faced with the paradox that each of us is a complete human being, yet "the other" is opposite us, attracting us because he/she is different and complementary to us. I see man and woman as two poles with a different charge that creates the dynamic of life.

Dr. Mary Healy, a professor at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, responds: "First, my reaction to Dindia's analogy is that it's a good deal more accurate than the Mars-Venus analogy. It is sometimes forgotten by those seeking to emphasize male-female differences that men and women are members of the same species, possessing the same human nature created in the image of God, having similar hopes and dreams and fears and loves and sorrows. On the other hand, there is often an ideological agenda among those who seek to eradicate the very real differences between the sexes, which is very often linked to a denial of the gift of femininity, even among those with a "feminist" agenda."

I don't think the "from different places" approach is all that helpful no matter how proximate the places are, even if it were "men are from East Main St., women from West Main St." Men and women have the same origin. They are different but complementary, not only physically but emotionally,



intellectually, psychologically, and spiritually. In a very real way, a man can understand a woman better than another woman, and a woman can understand a man better than other men—at least when they are united in spousal union—because men and women were created for each other. Dietrich von Hildebrand makes this point in *Marriage: The Mystery of Faithful Love*.

In fact, in her book *Men and Women are From Eden*, Dr. Healy elaborates on the question of what metaphor best describes the male-female relationship. She writes, “Popular wisdom tells us that ‘Men are from Mars, women are from Venus.’ This humorous maxim does seem to be borne out by experience. Deep in every human heart is inscribed the desire to love and be loved in an intimate, lasting relationship. . . . The secret of man and woman is found not on different planets but in the biblical account of the first couple, created by God and placed in the garden of Paradise at the dawn of human history. Men and women are from Eden!”

Jason Evert, a popular author and public speaker from the Chastity Project and Catholic Answers, offers this insight: “Overall, I think that Prof. Wade is correct that we’re more similar than dissimilar, when viewed from a purely biological perspective: we all have 10 fingers and 10 toes, and much of the same anatomical features. For example, my wife and I certainly look more alike than elephant seal couples. Fair enough. I think it’s fair to concede that point, especially in order to build a bridge for dialogue.”

However, the real question is this: Is there more to the human person than what can be viewed externally? If we view the human person merely as a collection of body parts, then we’re beginning our research with an inadequate anthropology. This methodology could be compared to someone who expects a ruler and a scale to determine the similarities and differences between a laptop computer and a pizza box. If the tools of measurement are insufficient, the data gathered might be accurate, but the conclusions drawn from the data would be incomplete.

I think it is healthy for people to celebrate gender differences, without having to “obsess” over them, as [Prof. Wade] states. So, instead of speaking of the “opposite” sex, perhaps a more precise term would be the “complementary sex.”

In regards to my opinion on Dindia’s metaphor for the relationship between men and women, she may be playing a bit loose with the facts when she says that sex differences are small for “many” variables. Indeed that’s true, but what about all the variables in which the sex differences are large? Just ask any couple who has been married (or divorced) if they think men and women is basically the same, and you’ll find very few who would agree.

If Dindia thinks that men and women are like North and South Dakota (which is essentially one land mass, separated arbitrarily by a state line imposed by a government, eons after its creation), then this would seem to be imprecise. I think the best indicator of our differences and similarities is not to compare us to different planets or states, but to look at our bodies. This gives us an indication of what we have in common, and what makes us uniquely male and female persons.

Mary Shivanandan, S.T.D., retired professor of theology at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at the Catholic University of America, comments: “Because man’s ultimate origin and destiny as a unity of body and soul are beyond this earth, there can be no true analogy from the material world of the unity in difference of human masculinity and femininity. Both analogies, “men are from Mars, women are from Venus” and “men are from North Dakota, women from South Dakota” are inadequate. The latter does have the advantage of emphasizing their common substance but minimizes the difference. The differences between North and South Dakota are geographical and



material, not ontological, which does not allow for fecundity. If the two states unite into the one state of Dakota, they would not produce a third, distinct, and separate entity while still remaining North and South Dakota. Although Venus and Mars are planets, so that there is a recognition that the difference is beyond this earth, the implication is that they have nothing in common ontologically. Once again they cannot unite and produce a third both similar and different without partial or complete destruction.”

As Angelo Cardinal Scola says, the love, sexual difference, and procreation of human masculinity and femininity are an analogy of Trinitarian relations, where there is unity of substance and three persons. The three Persons are not autonomous individuals but substantive relations. The Father is eternal generation, the Son is eternally begotten, and the Holy Spirit is the fecund love between Father and Son. Men and women share the same human substance, but as different bodily manifestations they are ordered to one another. Masculinity makes no sense without the existence of the feminine. Because of their unity in difference they can produce a third equal to and like themselves but different and open to the infinite.

Elsewhere, Dr. Shivanandan has explained that gender is central to Christian anthropology and is not just a social construction. Citing Pope St. John Paul II’s exegesis of Genesis, she states, “It is not good that man should be alone.’ So, God creates Eve out of Adam’s rib, which indicates she shares the same humanity, the same attributes of being a person... . Yet Eve is different. Eve is a *different* manifestation of the same humanity. And that difference is not just superficial but belongs to her very way of being a person. ... In any giving and receiving of love, the integrity of the person must be preserved. This means that the man can never dominate the woman or use her for his own selfish ends. He must always receive her in her femininity as a gift from the hand of God, just as he received his own being from God. Only in this way can man and woman enjoy the fullness of communion and image divine Trinitarian union. The difference, which can never be overcome but only shared, must always be honored. It is this communion of complete self-giving that constitutes original happiness.”

The question of what it means to be male and female is increasingly important today, as the traditional view is being swept away and public figures are ushering in a new gender regime with policies like public unisex bathrooms and the creation of rights for “transgender” persons and other so-called sexual minorities, as the culture affirms the “fluidity” of sexual identity, and as the courts redefine the meaning of marriage. We are living in an era when accusations of bigotry and lawsuits alleging human rights violations are brought against individuals and institutions that affirm natural sexual differences. It has even been proposed that the English language should change to accommodate “gender non-conformists”: gendered pronouns should be eliminated as discriminatory. (Many who advocate this language revolution are part of the so-called “Preferred Gender Pronoun” movement.)

In response to the Dakotas metaphor, Dr. Leonard Sax, a physician and psychologist who has written extensively on childhood development and sex differences, told me, “I am particularly appalled by analogies of the form ‘Men are from X, women are from Y.’ Such crudities are suitable for bloggers or pundits, perhaps. But scholars should strive to be accurate rather than cute.” And, when it comes to assessing the use by Prof. Dindia and Prof. Wade of the Dakotas metaphor, his may be the most appropriate conclusion: their metaphor is a simplistic, misleading caricature of the nuanced and complex ways men and women relate with each other within families and communities, as they contribute their distinct gifts and participate in unique ways.

Nevertheless, such metaphors can have a powerful effect on how people think about identity and



relationships, and therefore can influence personal attitudes and behaviors as well as the ways issues are discussed in the cultural and political arenas. Therefore, it is important to articulate a Catholic response to the erroneous but popular notions of male-female differences we encounter daily on the Internet, on TV, in workplace conversations, and classrooms.

The implications of the debate over male-female relations are vast. The opposing views explored here reveal a culture riven by mutually exclusive understandings of human nature. It is from this basic starting point—a mistaken view of human nature—in which the errors of modern society have their origin, and spread to influence decision-making on the most important issues of our day, ranging from marriage to abortion to reproductive technology to assisted suicide and euthanasia. What does it mean to be human? As St. Thomas Aquinas said, if we get the starting point wrong, we will go in the wrong direction and may ultimately arrive at fatal conclusions.