

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 19

Created in the image of God

By Leela Ramdeen 09.10.05

Today we focus on Part One of the *Compendium*, Chapter 3 entitled: “The Human Person and Human Rights - Sections I – Social Doctrine and the Personalist Principle; and II (a): Creatures in the image of God”

We are reminded that 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’ (*Gaudium et Spes*); for this reason the Church recognises 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 (*Redemptor Hominis*), and she invites all people to recognise 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) (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1931).

“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, recognising 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; (Congregation for Catholic Education).

“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’ (Pius XII Radio Message of Dec 24, 1944).

The origin of social life is therefore found in the human person, and society cannot refuse to recognise its active and responsible subject; every expression of society must be directed towards the human person.

“Men and women, in the concrete circumstances of history, represent the heart and soul of Catholic social thought (*Centesimus Annus*). The whole of the Church’s social doctrine, in fact, develops from the principle that affirms the inviolable dignity of the human person (*Mater et Magistra*).

In her manifold expression 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.

“The fundamental message of Sacred Scripture proclaims that the human person is a creature of God (Ps 139:14-18), and sees in his being in the image of God the element that characterises and distinguishes him: ‘*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*’ (Gen 1:27). God places the human creature at the centre and summit of the created order. Man...is formed from the earth...and God blows into his nostrils the breath of life (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’ (*Catechism*, 357).

“The likeness with God shows that the essence and existence of man are constitutively related to God in the most profound manner (*Catechism*, 356, 358). 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’ (*Catechism*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Evangelium Vitae*). 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 (*Catechism*, 1721). “

During this Year of the Eucharist, let us remember that it is the Eucharist that will help us to develop our relationship with God and with all of creation. At a time of great disunity, crime and violence in our country, let us remember the words of John Paul II: “The seeds of disunity, which daily experience shows to be so deeply rooted in humanity as a result of sin, are countered by the unifying power of the body of Christ. The Eucharist, precisely by building up the Church, creates human community.” (On the Eucharist and its relationship to the Church)