

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 20

Relationship between man, woman and creation

By Leela Ramdeen 16.10.05

We focus today on Part One, Chapter 3 of the *Compendium*, entitled: "The Human Person and Human Rights – Section II (a): Creatures in the image of God (con't).

The *Compendium* reminds us that 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' (*Gaudium et Spes*).

In this regard the fact that God created human beings as man and woman (Gen 1:27) is significant (*Catechism*, 369): '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 (Gen 2:20).

"Only the appearance of the woman, a being who is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones (Gen 2:23), and in whom the spirit of God the Creator is also alive, can satisfy the need for interpersonal dialogue, so vital for human existence. In one's neighbour, whether man or woman, there is a reflection of God himself, the definitive goal and fulfillment of every person) (*Evangelium Vitae*).

"Man and woman have the same dignity and are of equal value (*Catechism*, 2334), 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 (*Catechism*, 371).

"In a relationship of mutual communion, man and woman fulfil themselves in a profound way, discovering themselves as persons through the sincere gift of themselves (John Paul II, Letter to Families (1994)).

Their covenant of union is presented in Sacred Scripture as an image of the Covenant of God with man (Hos 1-3; Is 54; Eph 5:21-33) and, at the same time, as a service to life (*Gaudium et Spes*). 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).

"Man and woman are in relationship with others above all as those to whom the lives of others have been entrusted (*Evangelium Vitae*). '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 (*Catechism*, 2258).

"The fifth commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill' (Ex 20:13; Deut 5:17), has validity because God alone is Lord of life and death. (*Catechism*, 2259 – 2261).

The respect owed to the inviolability and integrity of physical life finds its climax in the positive commandment: ‘*You shall love your neighbour as yourself*’ (Lev 19:18), by which Jesus enjoins the obligation to tend to the needs of one’s neighbour (Mt 22:37-40; Mk 12:29-31; Li 10:27-28).

“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 domination 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’ (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18-21, 25) in the sight of God, who is its author.

“Man must discover and respect its value. This is a marvellous challenge to his intellect, which should lift him up on wings (*Fides et Ratio*) 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 domination over the world consists in naming things (Gen 2:19-20). In giving things their names, man must recognise them for what they are and establish with each of them a relationship of responsibility. (*Catechism*, 373).

“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. ‘*All that he does is apt for its time; but though he has permitted man to consider time in its wholeness, man cannot comprehend the work of God from beginning to end*’ (Ecclesiastes 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 (*Evangelium Vitae*). When he listens to the deep aspirations of his heart, no person can fail to make his own 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.’”

As we gather in the Savannah to mark the end of the Year of the Eucharist, let us open our hearts to the transforming power present in the Eucharist, remembering that as Pope John Paul II said:

“Eucharist ...spurs us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us. Christians will feel more obliged than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens in this world. Theirs is the task of contributing with the light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God’s plan...In the humble signs of bread and wine, changed into his body and blood, Christ walks beside us as our strength and our food for the journey, and he enables us to become, for everyone, witnesses of hope” (On the Eucharist in its relationship to the Church).