

GRIST

Diocese of New Ulm Social Concerns Office March, 2007

Human Dignity and Social Responsibility

Catholic social teaching is summarized in the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/arch_ive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html, (155 pages, 598 questions & answers), especially in the discussion of the fourth, fifth, and seventh commandments. Here are some excerpts from the *Compendium*, related to the themes of human dignity and social responsibility.

The **dignity of the human person** is rooted in his or her creation in the image and likeness of God.

#358

Freedom characterizes properly human acts. The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes.

#363

Justice consists in the firm and constant will to give to others their due.

#381

Love of neighbor is inseparable from love for God.

#401

The human *person* is and ought to be the principle, the subject and the end of all social institutions.

#402

Charity, which requires and makes possible the practice of justice, is the greatest social commandment.

#404

Every human community needs a legitimate authority that preserves order and contributes to the realization of the common good.

#405

By the **common good** is meant the sum total of those conditions of social life which allow people as groups and as individuals to reach their proper fulfillment.

#407

The common good involves: respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person, the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of persons and society, and the peace and security of all.

#408

The most complete realization of the common good is found in those political communities which defend and promote the good of their citizens and of intermediate groups without forgetting the universal good of the entire human family. #409

All men and women according to the place and role that they occupy participate in promoting the common good by respecting just laws and taking charge of the areas for which they have personal responsibility such as the care of their own family and the commitment to their own work. Citizens also should take an active part in public life as far as possible. #410

Society ensures **social justice** when it respects the dignity and the rights of the person as the proper end of society itself. Furthermore, society pursues social justice, which is linked to the common good and to the exercise of authority, when it provides the conditions that allow associations and individuals to obtain what is their due. #411

All persons enjoy **equal dignity and fundamental rights** insofar as they are created in the image of the one God, are endowed with the same rational soul, have the same nature and origin, and are called in Christ, the one and only Savior, to the same divine beatitude. #412

There are **sinful social and economic inequalities** which affect millions of human beings. These inequalities are in open contradiction to the Gospel and are contrary to justice, to the dignity of persons, and to peace. There are, however, differences among people caused by various factors which enter into the plan of God. Indeed, God wills that each might receive what he or she needs from others and that those endowed with particular talents should share them with others. Such differences encourage and often oblige people to the practice of generosity, kindness and the sharing of goods. They also foster the mutual enrichment of cultures. #413

Solidarity, which springs from human and Christian brotherhood, is manifested in the first place by the just distribution of goods, by a fair remuneration for work and by zeal for a more just social order. The *virtue* of solidarity also practices the sharing of the spiritual goods of faith which is even more important than sharing material goods. #414

The **family** is the original cell of human society and is, therefore, prior to any recognition by public authority. Family values and principles constitute the foundation of social life. Family life is an initiation into the life of society. #457

Authority should always be exercised as a service, respecting fundamental human rights, a just hierarchy of values, laws, distributive justice, and the principle of subsidiarity. All those who exercise authority should seek the interests of the community before their own interest and allow their decisions to be inspired by the truth about God, about man and about the world. #463

Those subject to authority should regard those in authority as representatives of God and offer their loyal collaboration for the right functioning of public and social life. This collaboration includes love and service of one's homeland, the right and duty to vote, payment of taxes, the defense of one's country, and the right to exercise constructive criticism. #464

A citizen is obliged in conscience not to obey the laws of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order. #465

Human life must be respected because it is *sacred*. From its beginning human life involves the creative action of God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. It is not lawful for anyone directly to destroy an innocent human being. This is gravely contrary to the dignity of the person and the holiness of the Creator. #466

Peace in this world, which is required for the respect and development of human life, is not simply the absence of war or a balance of power between adversaries. It is "the tranquility of order" (Saint Augustine), "the work of justice" (*Isaiah 32:17*) and the effect of charity. Earthly peace is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ. #481

Earthly peace requires the equal distribution and safeguarding of the goods of persons, free communication among human beings, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of justice and fraternity. #482

The **right to private property** exists provided the property is acquired or received in a just way and that the **universal destination of goods** for the satisfaction of the basic needs of all takes precedence. #504

The seventh commandment requires respect for the goods of others through the practice of justice and charity, temperance and solidarity. In particular it requires *respect for promises made and contracts agreed to, reparation for injustice* committed and restitution of stolen goods, and respect for the *integrity of creation* by the prudent and moderate use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe with special attention to those species which are in danger of extinction. #506

Social and economic life should be pursued according to its own proper methods within the sphere of the moral order, at the service of the whole human being and of the entire human community in keeping with social justice. Social and economic life should have the human person as its author, center, and goal. #511

Work is both a duty and a right through which human beings collaborate with God the Creator. Indeed, by working with commitment and competence we fulfill the potential inscribed in our nature, honor the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him, provide for ourselves and for our families, and serve the human community. Furthermore, by the grace of God, work can be a means of sanctification and collaboration with Christ for the salvation of others. #513

Love for the poor is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes and by the example of Jesus in his constant concern for the poor. Jesus said, "Whatever you have done to the least of my brethren, you have done to me." Love for the poor shows itself through the struggle against material poverty and also against the many forms of cultural, moral, and religious poverty. The spiritual and corporal works of mercy and the many charitable institutions formed throughout the centuries are a concrete witness to the preferential love for the poor which characterizes the disciples of Jesus. #520