

## The Principle of Rights and Responsibilities

*The 10 second Summary:*

### What does the Church say about Rights and Responsibilities?

The protection of human dignity is the foundation upon which an understanding of rights and responsibilities rests. The human person, made in God's image and likeness, is born into a community of relationships and is social by nature. Rights and responsibilities are seen as the demands of upholding and defending human dignity in the social, economic and political spheres.

Rights begin with the most fundamental of rights, the right to life and include the right to those things necessary for basic human survival. The responsibilities begin with responsibilities to one another, to one's family and to the larger society.

### What does the Catechism say?

"The faithful should "distinguish carefully between the rights and the duties which they have as belonging to the Church and those which fall to them as members of the human society. They will strive to unite the two harmoniously, remembering that in every temporal affair they are to be guided by a Christian conscience, since no human activity, even of the temporal order, can be withdrawn from God's dominion."<sup>1</sup>

*"The life of the community, both domestically and internationally, clearly demonstrates that respect for rights, and the guarantees that follow from them, are measures of the common good that serve to evaluate the relationship between justice and injustice, development and poverty, security and conflict."*

*-Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the United Nations, April, 2008*

*How does this teaching on Rights connect with my life?*

#### **It provides:**

- Principles for reflection;
- Criteria for judgment;
- Guidelines for action;
- Tools for conscience formation.

### Where does this teaching on Rights come from?

- **Biblical source:** Scripture—rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.
- **Moral source:** Tradition— the use of reason and reflection based in the Catholic tradition.
- **Ecclesial source:** Church teaching—expressed in the Popes' Encyclical letters, Apostolic letters, Synod documents, Apostolic exhortations, and the Bishops' pastoral letters, which respond to the issues of the day.

<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1994. #912.



## Rights Promoted and Defended by the Church

*The social teaching on rights begins first and foremost with a concern for upholding and defending the dignity of the human person.*



### **Categories of Rights:**

- Civil Rights**
- Political Rights**
- Social Rights**
- Cultural Rights**
- Economic Rights**
- Religious Rights**

*“The promotion of human rights remains the most effective strategy for eliminating inequalities between countries and social groups, and for increasing security.”*

*-Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the United Nations, April, 2008*

Rights are realized in community. They provide a means by which human persons in a society can function effectively thereby securing respect for human dignity as well as the promotion of public order and the common good. The following list of rights are found in the encyclicals that comprise the Church’s body of Catholic Social Teaching.

- the right to life, food and shelter (RN #4, 10)
- the right to private property (RN #5)
- the right to choose one’s state in life (RN #9)
- the right to a living wage (RN #34)
- the right to a just wage (LE #19)
- the rights of workers to form unions (RN #38)
- the right to life and a worthy standard of living (PT #11)
- the right to moral and cultural values (PT #12-13)
- the right to worship according to one’s conscience (PT #14)
- the right to freely choose one’s state of life and establish a family (PT #15-17)
- the right to emigrate and immigrate (PT #25)
- the right to rest (LE #19)
- the right to a work that is not harmful to one’s conscience or personal dignity (LE #15)
- the right to appropriate subsidies for unemployed workers and their families (LE #18)
- the right to a pension in old age, sickness or injury (LE #19)
- the right to social security connected with maternity (LE #19)
- the right to assemble and form associations (QA #23)
- the right to religious freedom (DH #13)
- the right to development (JM #15)
- the right to freedom of expression and thought (JM #44)
- the right to private initiative and ownership (CA #43)

### Key to documents referred to in ( ) above:

- |                              |                               |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| RN - Rerum Novarum, 1891     | PT - Pacem in Terris, 1963    |
| LE - Laborem Exercens, 1981  | DH - Dignitatis Humanae, 1968 |
| JM - Justicia in Mundo, 1971 | CA - Centesimus Annus, 1991   |

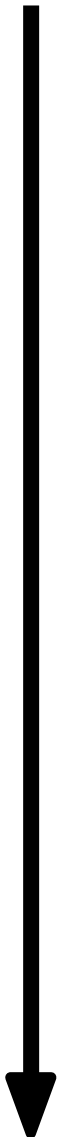


## How Has This Teaching Developed?

REJECTION OF  
“RIGHTS”  
LANGUAGE



RIGHTS: A  
NECESSARY  
TOOL



### 18th Century

- At the dawn of the Enlightenment, the Church had great suspicions and criticisms of the motives and content of the ideas of the day, including the notions of individual rights, liberty and equality.
- The Popes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused on the flaws of liberalism and were still preoccupied with the loss of the Papal States.
- The Church rejected the ideas of the French Revolution enshrined in the, “*Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*,” key among them was the assertion of individual rights.

### 1878-1903

- As Kingdoms gave way to nation-states and progress created new human dilemmas, Pope Leo XIII began to warm to the subject and language of individual rights.
- Human beings needed the basic guarantee of rights to protect and promote human dignity. As liberal institutions enshrined the ideas and values of the Enlightenment, the powerless needed protection by the State due to the exploitation of human beings and other harmful consequences at the rise of the Industrial Revolution.
- An appeal to protecting human life became the first and most universal right. Leo stressed that the person was prior to the State and therefore required a sphere of protection that could not be encroached upon by the State.
- Asserting and protecting the social and economic rights of human beings became a bold new position of the Church, as seen in Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*.

### 1922-1939

- Pius XI further developed the Church’s juridical and philosophical thinking regarding the rights of the person in relation to the State.
- The rise of socialism and communism led the Pope to assert a list of the rights of a person in relation to the State as well as corresponding list of duties.

### 1939-1958

- During the Second World War, Pius XII gave a series of radio addresses further refining and articulating the Church’s position enshrining an appeal to rights needed to restore justice and peace in response to war.
- Pius XII began to express a new acceptance and affirmation of democratic political structures.
- As a response to the horrors of World War II, the United Nations was formed and subsequently drafted the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Pius XII said little in response to this document.

(Continued on next page)

## RIGHTS & THE CHURCH IN DIALOGUE



## RIGHTS ENSHRINED & AFFIRMED



### 1962-1968

- During the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Church saw the role of human rights as essential for the Church's functioning in the modern world.
- In documents like *Gaudium et Spes* and *Justice in the World*, emphasis was placed on human liberty and human rights.
- A notable addition to the previous list of rights emerged in the, "Declaration on Religious Liberty" (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 1965).
- This document, largely the work of John Courtney Murray, S.J., declared that the human person has the right to religious freedom. It also set forth arguments embracing religious pluralism and the sanctity of conscience.

### 1962-1965

- Unlike his predecessor, Pope John XXIII embraced great openness to dialogue with the international community on human rights.
- Under his leadership, the Church continued to voice its support for a variety of rights and recognized human rights in particular as necessary for building the foundation of peace in *Pacem in Terris*.
- John XXIII explored the rights of individuals within the community, rights among political communities and the need for rights to be respected and protected among nations. *Pacem in Terris* is essentially the Church's declaration on human rights.

### 1978-2005

- Pope John Paul II developed and articulated the theological underpinnings of the Church's understanding of human rights.
- Over the span of his 25-year pontificate, he developed the Christological and Incarnational understandings of human rights.
- In his challenge to the world to overcome the culture of death, John Paul II continued to assert the right to life as the most fundamental of rights.

### 2005-

- Pope Benedict XVI addressed the United Nations in April, 2008 and summarized the current state of the Church's view, "*The common good that human rights help to accomplish cannot be attained merely by applying correct procedures, nor even less by achieving a balance between competing rights. The merit of the Universal Declaration is that it has enabled different cultures, juridical expressions and institutional models to converge around a fundamental nucleus of values, and hence of rights.*"

#### Sources:

Dwyer, Judith, ed. *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994.

"Rights and Duties" p. 849-851

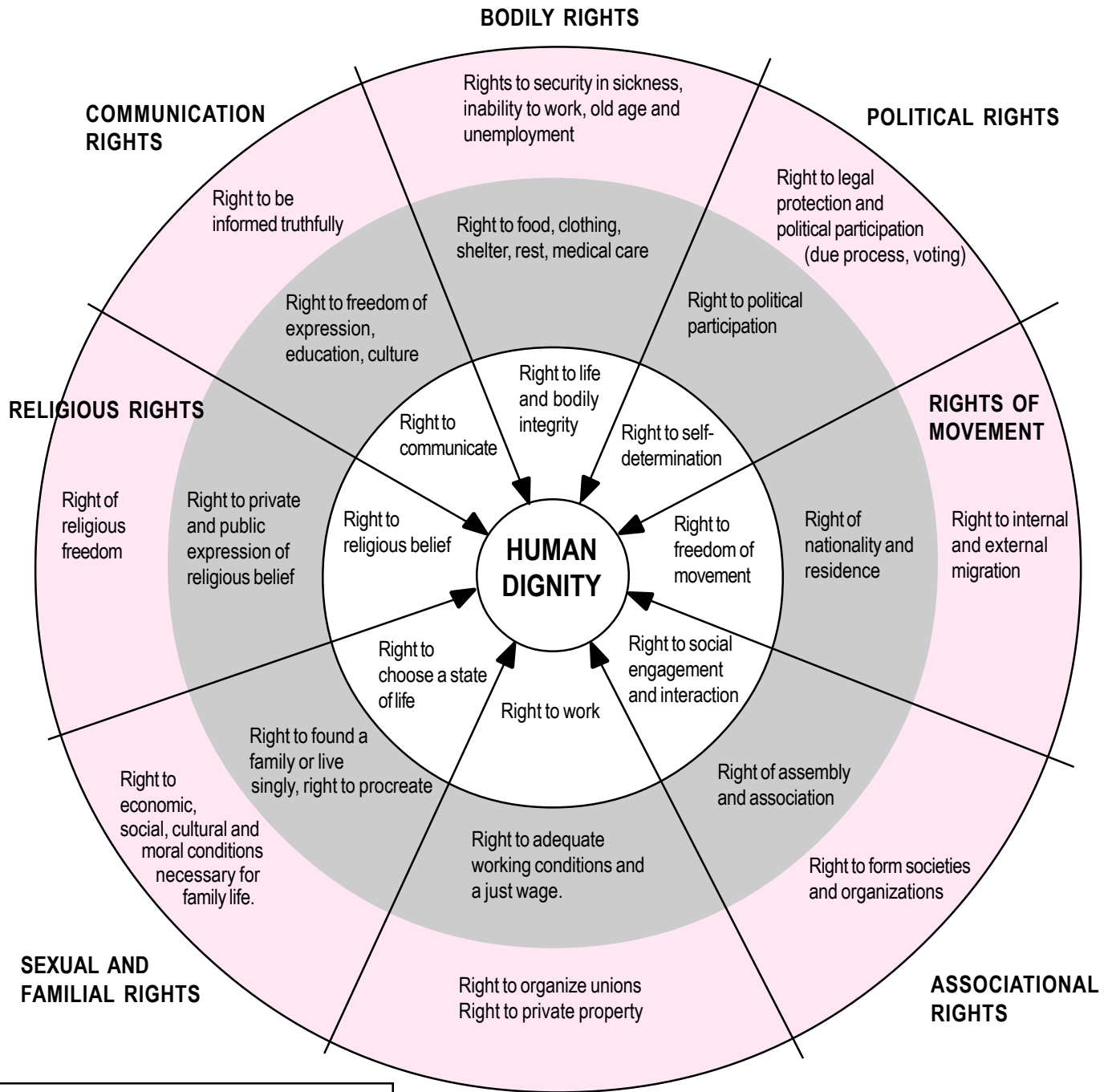
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



# RIGHTS & DUTIES

## Levels of Rights: Personal, Social and Institutional



### Key: Levels of Rights

-  **Personal Rights** - Personal rights belong to every human being and create duties which bind other persons, society and the state.
-  **Social Rights** - These rights are realized in different ways in different societies and cultures. These are positive obligations of society toward all its members and are indispensable for the realization of human dignity.
-  **Institutional Rights** - are realized and mediated through institutions such as the state, the legal system, the economic institutions

The chart above depicts the levels of rights and the relationships between them according to the rights theory found in the encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*. Rights theory in the social tradition recognizes the importance of the social nature of the person and role that context plays in the promotion and guarantee of rights.

Source of Diagram: Hollenbach, David. *Claims in Conflict*. Paulist Press, 1974, p. 98



## Encyclicals and Rights

This chart highlights some of the historical developments, or “signs of the times” that caused the Church to take notice and respond to the call for rights.<sup>3</sup>

What were the signs of the times?	Document & Year	What was proposed?
The inhumane treatment of workers as a result of the Industrial Revolution moved the Church to advocate for the rights of workers through labor unions, and support for the right to private property.	<i>The Condition of Labor (Rerum Novarum)</i> Leo XIII 1891	Pope Leo XIII supports the rights of workers to form associations (unions) to provide safeguards from being exploited at the rise of the Industrial Revolution. The rights to private property and a just wage are asserted to ensure a worker’s ability to reap the benefit of the fruit of his/her labor. The Church stands with the worker and the poor.
Severe economic depression world wide and growing social injustice were making it clear that threats to human dignity could not be contained within political borders. Both capitalism and communism were seen as threats to rights of human beings.	<i>The Reconstruction of the Social Order (Quadragesimo Anno)</i> Pius XI 1931	Pius XI focuses on the right to life, to the economic means of existence, to the right to follow one’s path marked out by God, the right of free association and the right to possess and use property.
Severe gaps between the rich and the poor in the world were becoming evident and problematic for the realization of human dignity. The use or misuse of power was a significant reality.	<i>Christianity and Social Progress (Mater et Magistra)</i> John XXIII 1961	The inequalities between rich and poor countries required analysis. Private property rights were confirmed.
The growing threat of nuclear war was extremely problematic. The world was beginning to realize its capacity to destroy itself and that threat was choking off the development of peoples, particularly the poor.	<i>Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris)</i> John XXIII 1963	Asserted that the human person is entitled to civil, political, social and economic rights. “Universal” rights include the right to life and the right to bodily integrity, the right to food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care and education. This document is essentially the Church’s declaration of human rights.
The Second Vatican Council was wrestling with articulating a “modern” understanding of the role of the Church in the world. Ideological divisions in the world were a threat to human unity.	<i>The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)</i> 1965	In the movement of Vatican’s theology which included ‘a turn to the subject’ as well as turn towards the world, a growing awareness of the global interdependence of the human community results in an articulation of the importance of safeguarding every human person’s basic rights.
The Church had until this point largely opposed the liberal reforms of the Enlightenment and brought about a separation of church and state. Prior to this document, the Church had never recognized the right to religious freedom.	<i>The Declaration on Religious Freedom (Dignitatis humanae)</i> Paul VI 1965	This landmark document was addressed to the world at large and affirmed that religious freedom was the right of every human person. This was a dramatic shift from the Church’s previous position which held that those who professed other religious beliefs were in error, and error had no rights.

<sup>3</sup> For a complete analysis of these documents see, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, by Kenneth Himes, ed. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005.

# RIGHTS & DUTIES

What were the signs of the times?	Document & Year	What was proposed?
Extreme poverty and global hunger were becoming more widespread. Rapid communication and increased ability to travel were generating unprecedented global awareness.	<i>The Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)</i> Pope Paul VI 1967	The focus here was on the articulation of economic rights and the economic well-being of all persons recognizing we are morally responsible for one another and the lives of the world's rich are intertwined with the lives of the world's poor.
The dehumanizing effects of urbanization were becoming widespread. Growing numbers of poor, especially women and children, the elderly and handicapped were increasingly vulnerable to being ignored or exploited.	<i>A Call to Action (Octogesima Adversus)</i> Pope Paul VI 1971	A more theological vision of human dignity is presented here. Christian faith was in a unique position to reconcile the claims of the absolute truth and subjective claims in the quest for practical means of promoting human dignity.
The treatment of workers as exploitable factors of production, was posing a threat to human dignity. The rise of technology and its displacement of the worker was also cause for growing concern.	<i>On Human Work (Laborem Exercens)</i> John Paul II 1981	Reasserted the priority of labor (people) over capital. The letter deals specifically with human dignity as present in and enhanced by work. The human being is the "subject" of work and must always be respected.
The question of development has become more pressing. The problem of development exists not only in economically underdeveloped countries but in rich or economically developed ones as well.	<i>On Social Concerns (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis)</i> John Paul II 1987	The significant contribution to the reflection on human dignity lies in the development here of the concept of solidarity.
The rise of atheism, the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe (1989), and global uncertainty and instability are creating great change and shifts of political and economic power.	<i>One Hundred Years (Centesimus Annus)</i> John Paul II 1991	A rise of violence, atheism, and instability pose clear threats to human dignity. Here the call is renewed to take seriously the transcendent and social nature of the human person in order to protect human dignity.





## What Does the Catechism of the Catholic Church say about Rights and Responsibilities?

*The following are direct citations from the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Paragraph references precede each passage.*

- #912 The faithful should "distinguish carefully between the rights and the duties which they have as belonging to the Church and those which fall to them as members of the human society. They will strive to unite the two harmoniously, remembering that in every temporal affair they are to be guided by a Christian conscience, since no human activity, even of the temporal order, can be withdrawn from God's dominion.
- #1925 The common good consists of three essential elements: respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person; prosperity, or the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society; the peace and security of the group and of its members.
- #1928 Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation. Social justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority.
- #1929 Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of man. The person represents the ultimate end of society, which is ordered to him:  
What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt.
- #1930 Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy. If it does not respect them, authority can rely only on force or violence to obtain obedience from its subjects. It is the Church's role to remind men of good will of these rights and to distinguish them from unwarranted or false claims.
- #1935 The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it.
- #2237 Political authorities are obliged to respect the fundamental rights of the human person. They will dispense justice humanely by respecting the rights of everyone, especially of families and the disadvantaged.  
The political rights attached to citizenship can and should be granted according to the requirements of the common good. They cannot be suspended by public authorities without legitimate and proportionate reasons. Political rights are meant to be exercised for the common good of the nation and the human community.
- #2254 Public authority is obliged to respect the fundamental rights of the human person and the conditions for the exercise of his freedom.
- #2273 The inalienable right to life of every innocent human individual is a constitutive element of a civil society and its legislation.

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Source: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.



## Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- 1.) Why has the appeal to “rights” become an important and vital part of the Church’s social teaching?
- 2.) What rights are the most important to you? What rights do you think are most important to people who are in poverty around the world?
- 3.) What have you heard in the news lately about the violations of human rights in different parts of the world? Why do you think this is global news?
- 4.) What are recent signs of hope that indicate that the global community is moving toward a more just world where all peoples’ rights are respected?



Human Rights Sculpture, Dublin, Ireland

Photo credit: Derek Blackadder Cobourg, ON, Canada

**OUR SOCIETY HAS RIGHTLY** enshrined the greatness and dignity of the human person in various declarations of rights, formulated in the wake of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted exactly sixty years ago. That solemn act, in the words of Pope Paul VI, was one of the greatest achievements of the United Nations. In every continent the Catholic Church strives to ensure that human rights are not only proclaimed but put into practice. It is to be hoped that agencies created for the defense and promotion of human rights will devote all their energies to this task and, in particular, that the Human Rights Council will be able to meet the expectations generated by its creation.

Benedict XVI's Address to Ambassadors, "Diplomacy Must Give Hope", January 7, 2008



## Selected Quotes from Catholic Social Teaching on Rights and Responsibilities

There is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of human persons, who stand above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable. They ought, therefore, to have ready access to all that is necessary for living a genuinely human life: for example, food, clothing, housing, the right freely to choose their state of life and set up a family, the right to education, work, to their good name, to respect, to proper knowledge, the right to act according to the dictates of conscience and to safeguard their privacy, and rightful freedom, including freedom of religion.

The Church in the Modern World, #26

It is no easy matter to define the relative rights and mutual duties of the rich and of the poor, of capital and of labor. And the danger lies in this, that crafty agitators are intent on making use of these differences of opinion to pervert men's judgments and to stir up the people to revolt.

Rerum Novarum #2

For, every man has by nature the right to possess property as his own. This is one of the chief points of distinction between man and the animal creation, for the brute has no power of self-direction, but is governed by two main instincts, which keep his powers on the alert, impel him to develop them in a fitting manner, and stimulate and determine him to action without any power of choice.

Rerum Novarum #6

Beginning our discussion of the rights of man, we see that every man has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life; these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and finally the necessary social services. Therefore a human being also has the right to security in cases of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, unemployment, or in any other case in which he is deprived of the means of subsistence through no fault of his own.

Pacem in Terris, #11

The natural rights with which we have been dealing are inseparably connected, in the very person who is their subject, with just as many respective duties; and rights as well as duties find their source, their sustenance and their inviolability in the natural law which grants or enjoins them.

Peace on Earth, #28

A well-ordered human society requires that men recognize and observe their mutual rights and duties. It also demands that each contribute generously to the establishment of a civic order in which rights and duties are more sincerely and effectively acknowledged and fulfilled.

Peace on Earth, #31

It is not enough, for example, to acknowledge and respect every man's right to the means of subsistence if we do not strive to the best of our ability for a sufficient supply of what is necessary for his sustenance.

Peace on Earth, #32

The right to development must be seen as a dynamic interpenetration of all those fundamental human rights upon which the aspirations of individuals and nations are based.

Justice in the World, #15

The Church's social teaching rests on one basic principle: individual human beings are the foundation, the cause and the end of every social institution.

Mater et Magistra, #219

## Scripture Passages for Prayer and Reflection

When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place-- What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them rule over the works of your hands, put all things at their feet:

All sheep and oxen, even the beasts of the field, O LORD, our Lord, how awesome is your name through all the earth!  
Psalm 8: 4-10

Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed, and those who oppose it will bring judgment upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear to good conduct, but to evil. Do you wish to have no fear of authority? Then do what is good and you will receive approval from it, for it is a servant of God for your good. But if you do evil, be afraid, for it does not bear the sword without purpose; it is the servant of God to inflict wrath on the evildoer. Therefore, it is necessary to be subject not only because of the wrath but also because of conscience.

Romans 13: 1-6

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone.

Ephesians 2: 13-20

Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground." God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth." God also said: "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground, I give all the green plants for food." And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.

Genesis 1:26-31

In my distress I called out: LORD! I cried out to my God. From God's temple God heard my voice; my cry to God reached his ears.

Psalm 18: 7

Put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth. Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger, and do not leave room for the devil. The thief must no longer steal, but rather labor, doing honest work with his (own) hands, so that he may have something to share with one in need. No foul language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. (And) be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.

Ephesians 4:22-32

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