According to the “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church”, “The permanent principles of the Church’s social doctrine constitute the very heart of Catholic social teaching. These are the principles of: the dignity of the human person, …… which is the foundation of all the other principles and content of the Church’s social doctrine; the common good; subsidiarity; and solidarity. These principles, the expression of the whole truth about man known by reason and faith, are born of “the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarised in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society.”

These are principles of a general and fundamental nature, since they concern the reality of society in its entirety: from close and immediate relationships to those mediated by politics, economics and law; from relationships among communities and groups to relations among peoples and nations. Because of their permanence in time and their universality of meaning, the Church presents them as the primary and fundamental parameters for interpreting and evaluating social phenomena…

The principles of the Church’s social doctrine must be appreciated in their unity, interrelatedness and articulation. ….

The principles of the social doctrine, in their entirety, constitute that primary articulation of the truth of society by which every conscience is challenged and invited to interact with every other conscience in truth, in responsibility shared fully with all people and also regarding all people. …

These principles have a profound moral significance because they refer to the ultimate and organisational foundations of life in society.”

HUMAN DIGNITY

“ IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE CREATED THEM: A THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

At the heart of the Christian understanding of human life is that extraordinary statement from the Book of Genesis: God created man in the image of himself; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. (Gen. 1.27) While there is something of God in everything that exists, the Creator chose to invest human creation with the image of God’s own self. In the Catholic tradition this belief is known as the doctrine of the imago Dei: being made in the image of a personal God gives us personhood and hence the dignity of God’s own self. Thus, as I pointed out earlier, dignity binds itself to person. We are never just a human something; we are always constituted as a human someone.

This sets up an important corollary: the ‘image of God’ that I am is not assigned to, say, my intellect only or my self-consciousness. Rather, every aspect of me is created in God’s image – all of me is invested with the dignity of God’s own self, including my body. This ‘all of me’ is significant: it says that each and every human being is both entirely and always a person created in God’s image. Entirely, because there is no part of me that is not imbued with the dignity of the personal image of God, and always, because is there no time in my historical reality when I am not imbued with this same dignity.

The doctrine of imago Dei not only tells us that human beings are persons in the image of God, but it also tells us something of the type of persons we are. The God of the Christian faith is a triune God: three persons – Father, Son, Spirit – in one being. There is something essentially relational about the nature of God. And it is this relationality that is embedded in human nature. Like God, each human person is both uniquely his or her own self and made for others. We are each a unique subject – with its concomitant sense of personal autonomy; however, this subjectivity is constituted only in and through our relationship to others. We, like the God in whose image we are made, are relational beings.

It is because we are relational beings that we recognise anyone with a human nature as being ‘one of us’. This ‘one of us-ness’ does not – cannot – admit of degrees: it is not something that is first quantifiable and then comparable between people. The measure of me as a person is not relative to someone else: I am absolutely a human person or I am not human at all. By implication, when someone’s status as a person is relativised, their dignity is undermined.” (14th WORLD DAY OF THE SICK – ADELAIDE 2006, FR PETER A COMENSOLI)
### Notable quotations from Catholic social teaching on the theme of Human Dignity

(Office for Social Justice, St Paul and Minneapolis)

<table>
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<th>Quotation</th>
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<td>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 to education, and work...</td>
<td>The Church and the Modern World, #26</td>
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<td>...this Council lays stress on reverence for the human person; everyone must consider one’s every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all 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.</td>
<td>The Church and the Modern World, #27</td>
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<td>...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.</td>
<td>The Church and the Modern World, #27</td>
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<td>Every perspective on economic life that is human, moral, and Christian must be shaped by three questions: What does the economy do for people? What does it do to people? And how do people participate in it?</td>
<td>Economic Justice for All, #1</td>
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<td>The basis for all that the Church believes about the moral dimensions of economic life is its vision of the transcendent worth -- the sacredness -- of human beings. The dignity of the human person, realized in community with others, is the criterion against which all aspects of economic life must be measured. All human beings, therefore, are ends to be served by the institutions that make up the economy, not means to be exploited for more narrowly defined goals. Human personhood must be respected with a reverence that is religious. When we deal with each other, we should do so with the sense of awe that arises in the presence of something holy and sacred. For that is what human beings are: we are created in the image of God (Gn 1:27).</td>
<td>Economic Justice for All, #28</td>
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<td>Any human society, if it is to be well-ordered and productive, must lay down as a foundation this principle, namely, that every human being is a person, that is, his nature is endowed with intelligence and free will. Indeed, precisely because he is a person he has rights and obligations flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature.</td>
<td>Peace on Earth, #9</td>
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The struggle against destitution, though urgent and necessary, is not enough. It is a question, rather, of building a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on him by other men or by natural forces over which he has not sufficient control; a world where freedom is not an empty word and where the poor man Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man.

*On the Development of Peoples*, #47

Wherefore, whatever the progress in technology and economic life, there can be neither justice nor peace in the world, so long as men fail to realize how great is their dignity; for they have been created by God and are His children.

*Mother and Teacher*, #215

Human persons are willed by God; they are imprinted with God's image. Their dignity does not come from the work they do, but from the persons they are.

*The Hundredth Year* (Donders translation), #11

The human person is the clearest reflection of God's presence in the world; all of the Church's work in pursuit of both justice and peace is designed to protect and promote the dignity of every person. For each person not only reflects God, but is the expression of God's creative work and the meaning of Christ's redemptive ministry.

*The Challenge of Peace*, #15

At the center of all Catholic social teaching are the transcendence of God and the dignity of the human person. The human person is the clearest reflection of God's presence in the world; all of the Church's work in pursuit of both justice and peace is designed to protect and promote the dignity of every person. For each person not only reflects God, but is the expression of God's creative work and the meaning of Christ's redemptive ministry.

*The Challenge of Peace*, #15

This teaching rests on one basic principle: individual human beings are the foundation, the cause and the end of every social institution. That is necessarily so, for men are by nature social beings.

*Mother and Teacher*, #219

Life, especially human life, belongs to God; whoever attacks human life attacks God's very self.

*The Gospel of Life* (Donders translation), #9