Reading Guide

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The Dignity of Every Person and Human Rights
Sources: *Pacem in Terris*, nn.8-38; *Gaudium et Spes*, nn.12-29; *Centesimus Annus*, nn.6-11

- Nearly all cultures and religions affirm human life and human dignity. What then is unique to the Catholic view of human dignity? (p.115)
- Human beings are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27). We are rational, intelligent beings with free will, who therefore have a right to have our inherent worth recognised (p.116).
- Thomas Massaro makes the claim that human dignity can never be lost, no matter how much of “sinner” a particular human being might become (which view of human dignity is he presupposing?) (p.116).
- The Catholic affirmation of human dignity leads it to a specific “pro-life” stance against “abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment” (p.116).
- Human dignity implies human equality: “a more equal sharing of political power, social status, and economic resources,” based upon God creating and saving all people (p.117). However, political, social and economic inequalities pervade today’s world (p.117).
- Human rights in the Catholic tradition are based upon a belief in God as the Creator, and human beings as (special) creatures having an inherent dignity (p.118). Secular human rights theories avoid particular religious or worldview claims (probably in an effort to be acceptable to everyone). Massaro criticises such secular frameworks as being “thin” in the sense of being too general, vague, and that they avoid specific recommendations (pp.118-119). (How might a “secular” human rights advocate respond?)

Solidarity, Common Good, and Participation
Sources: *Pacem in Terris*, nn.98-108; *Gaudium et Spes*, nn.26 -32, 68-75; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, nn.35-40.
“Solidarity” attests to interdependence as both a “fact” (people do depend on each other) and a “value” (this is a good thing, because people come to their full flourishing with others’ help, and in turn help others to flourish) (p.120).

A keyword of John Paul II (pp.120-121).

Solidarity starts with an individual’s decision to commit themselves to others, and grows out as actions which build up enduring relationships (p.121).

Solidarity is a counterbalance to individualism, self-interest and narcissism (pp.121-122)

The “common good” is the recognition of values and goals outside one’s own circle of interests, with the consequent obligation to contribute to a society where everyone may flourish (e.g. paying taxes to support education funding, even if one is childless; supporting environmentally-friendly policies, even though future generations are the primary beneficiary) (p.122).

“Participation” is the full involvement of every person in their society: politically (e.g. voting) and economically (e.g. paid employment) (pp.122-123). What does Massaro mean by calling participation “a right and a duty”?

Family Life
Sources: Gaudium et Spes, nn.47-52 ; Octogesima Adveniens, n.13 ; Laborem Exercens, nn. 10, 19.

Family is “the most basic unit of society” (p.87). It is the “first cell of society” (because family members do things for each other that wider society cannot); [Christian] families are a “domestic church” (because they introduce a baptised person to God and Christian moral life) (pp.124-125).

Family members are expected to practice (and often do) a higher degree of love, compassion and forgiveness for each other than for people of the general public (p.125). This both fulfils an important social function and anticipates absolute love in the kingdom of God (p.126).

However, in real life families often face pressures that hinder the expression of such demanding love (“poverty, illness, materialism, and the irresponsibility and routine inattentiveness family members”) (pp.126-127).

Government can make some contribution to family life (welfare, affordable daycare, medical care) (p.127).

Subsidiarity and the Proper Role of Government
Sources: Quadragesimo Anno, nn.76-87; Mater et Magistra, nn.51-77, 122-77; Pacem in Terris, nn.140-41.

“Subsidiarity” is the assignment of tasks and decisions at a local level when they affect that local community and can be carried out by that community. Larger governing bodies are only brought in when they are necessary; but when they are necessary, they should be brought into play (p.128-129).

The principle of subsidiarity means that national governments should not be relied upon excessively: it is against the centralisation of all resources (as in communism) (p.130).
• Subsidiarity also supports free association, such as people of a common interest meeting in clubs and societies, usually run on a volunteer basis (p.131).

Property Ownership in Modern Society: Rights and Responsibilities
Sources: Quadragesimo Anno, nn.44-52; Mater et Magistra, nn.51-67, 104-21; Centesimus Annus, nn.30-43.

• In the Catholic tradition, private property is a right of individuals, but not an absolute right. It is a right limited by wider society, especially by the existence of poorer others (p.133).
• The hoarding of wealth is considered an injustice in papal teaching (Paul VI, Popularum Progressio, 1967). However, the public seizure of privately owned goods is rarely advocated, but not completely ruled out (p.134).
• “Socialization” is the responsibility of public and governmental organisations to use property for the good of the population which they govern (e.g. energy resources and telecommunications). It corresponds to the responsibility of private persons and organisations to look out for the common good (pp.135-136). It is not socialism, the nationalisation of all industries (p.136).
• Socialization recognises that private property is not the eternal possession of an individual (Massaro implicitly alludes to the reality of death here), but is “mortaged” by the world and by a society for an individual’s use during their lifetime (and sometimes not even for the rest of one’s lifetime) (pp.136-137).

The Dignity of Work, Rights of Workers, and Support for Labor Unions
Sources: Rerum Novarum, nn.1-3, 20-21, 31-38; Mater et Magistra, nn.68-81; Laborem Exercens, nn.1-27.

• Employees, in return for carrying out their work, have a right to fair wages, reasonable working conditions, and the joining of unions (pp.138-139).
• Despite the negative public image of unions, joining them is a worker’s right consequent upon the rights of free association and political/economic participation (p.140).
• The presence of unions serves as a countermeasure to employers exploiting their employees (pp.140-141).
• Work is (ideally) a source of meaning, purpose and flourishing for human beings. This ideal persists as a (sometimes potential, sometimes realised) reality, despite the common experience of work as drudgery, humiliating and conflict-laden (p.141).
• Work is a human person’s participation in God’s creative activity, and so workers can never be reduced to their economic output, or treated as themselves commodities or products (pp.141-142).

Colonialism and Economic Development
Despite colonialism seeming to be a thing of the past, discussing it brings out values such as “fair international trade and self-determination,” in relation to issues of “neo-colonialism”.

The gaining of political independence in former European colonial countries has not always resulted in economic independence in relation to the richer countries (pp.142-143). There are still serious economic disparities between nations.

The basis for Catholic social teaching on economic development is the belief that all people form one human family (p.143). However, Catholic social teaching is less consistent on how this belief is to be put into practice (beyond advocating cooperation between governments in developing poorer populations’ wealth) (p.144).

Paul VI’s principles for international economic development are: “land reform in the third world”; “an end to export-maximizing policies”; “more generous international aid to support micro-development and ... credit to farmers and townspeople [in former colonized countries]” (pp.145-147).

[Structural sin is the emergence of systems which make the exercise of justice more difficult for individuals. They often begin in some individuals’ personal wrongdoing, and once they are established, make further injustice easier at a personal level].

John Paul II identified the two fundamental sources of structural sin as the inordinate desire for money and power (p.148).

It is difficult for “most middle-class churchgoers in the affluent countries” to feel empowered about doing much to alleviate world poverty (beyond “a vague sense of guilt”), but contributing something out of personal resources and finding ways of being in solidarity with the poor are still possible and obligatory (p.149).

**Peace and Disarmament**

**Sources:** *Pacem in Terris, nn.109-19; Gaudium et Spes, nn.77-79; U.S. bishops’ The Challenge of Peace.*

- Peace or *shalom* is an ideal, often frustrated by the repeated historical experience of brutal warfare (pp.150-151).
- There are two major Christian responses to the reality of war: pacifism and just war theory. “Total war” has always been rejected as incompatible with Christianity (p.151).
- Historically, just war theory has more often found support in the Catholic tradition than pacifism (p.151). However, pacifism tends to find more support than just war theory in some passages of the New Testament (pp.152-153).
- Just war theory is motivated by the need to defend the innocent from unjust aggressors. It seeks to do this by not inflicting more violence than absolutely necessary to subdue and disarm the aggressors.
- A new development to just war theory is the “responsibility to protect” (Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*).
Another development to just war theory has been proposed: justice in the aftermath of a war, *ius post bellum* (following the swift and successful invasion of Iraq, 2003, with the failure to resolve emerging conflicts and exit the country afterwards) (p.155).

Despite the traditional favouring of just war theory over pacifism by the magisterium, Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) and the U.S. bishops’ *The Challenge of Peace* (1983) show sympathy to the conscientious objection to supporting one’s country in times of war (p.156-157).

**Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

*Sources: Gaudium et Spes, n.1; Ocotgesima Adveniens, n.23; Centesimus Annus, n.11.*

- In the Christian tradition, a “preferential option for the poor” has always been present in some form or another since the writing of the New Testament, but has only been named such since 1979 (in magisterial documents) (p.158).
- The option for the poor and vulnerable is the ideal of showing more concern for the weakest members of society (p.159).
- This doctrine has its specific origins in the concrete situation of Latin American church and society, and found expression in liberation theology (pp.159-160).
- The preferential option is to stand in solidarity with the poorest peoples of the world and the poorest individuals of one’s own society (p.161).
- Its theological foundation is the example of Jesus in singling out the rejected members of his society for friendship, i.e. “tax-collectors, prostitutes and sinners” (implicit in Massaro’s words).