

Text 41:

## HOLY SEE

2 June 1537 - Pope Paul III  
**Bulle *Veritas Ipsa***

1555/9 - Bartoloméo de las Casas  
**Apologetica historia de las Indias**

(A) *In December 1511, in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Antonio de Montesinos denounced the enslavement of the American Indians by means of the encomienda system imposed by the Spanish colonists: "Are they not human beings? Do they not have reason and a soul? Are you not bound to love them as you love yourselves?" This intervention marked the beginning of the struggle for the recognition of the rights of the native peoples of America.*

*The Dominicans had procured from the Council of the Indies, established in 1524, a prohibition against making new slaves but, under pressure from the colonists, its implementation was delayed until 1534. A controversy arose between the Franciscan Zumarraga, Bishop of Mexico, who was against slavery, and the Dominican Betanzos, who placed the humanity of the Indians in doubt. At that point Pope Paul III, paying no heed to Charles V and to the latter's displeasure, intervened with the Bull "Veritas Ipsa" (2 June 1537) which condemned the enslavement of the Indians and affirmed their right, precisely as human beings, to freedom and property.*

"Truth himself, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, clearly affirmed when he entrusted the preachers of the faith with the ministry of the word: 'Go, teach all nations'. He said *all*, without exception, since all people are capable of receiving the teaching of faith. Perceiving this, the jealous enemy of the human race, ever hostile to human works in order to destroy them, devised a new way of preventing that the word of God be proclaimed to the nations for their salvation. He influenced certain of his minions, anxious to satisfy their greed, to declare publicly that the inhabitants of the West and South Indies, and other peoples still unknown to us at that time, should be used for our service, like brute beasts, under the pretext that they did not know the Catholic faith. They reduced them to slavery by imposing on them a forced labour which they would scarcely have dared to impose on their own domestic animals.

"Now We who, despite our unworthiness, are the Lord's representative on earth and wish, with all our strength, to bring into his fold those who have been entrusted to us and who are still outside the sheepfold, consider that the Indians, as true human beings, are not only capable of accepting the Christian faith but even more, from what We have learned, run with haste to embrace this faith. And desiring to bring them all the help necessary, We decide and declare, by these letters, in virtue of Our Apostolic Authority, that the said Indians and all other peoples whom Christians might come to know, even if they live outside the faith, can freely and licitly use, possess and enjoy freedom and the possession of their goods, and must not be enslaved. Every measure which contradicts these

principles is abrogated and invalid.

“Moreover, We decide and declare that the Indians and the other peoples must be invited to the said faith of Christ by the proclamation of the word of God and by the example of a virtuous life. All things past or future which are contrary to these regulations are to be considered null and void.

“Given at Rome, 2 June of the year 1537, the third of Our Pontificate.”

(B) *The New Laws of 1542 effectively suppressed the slavery of the Indians, but the debate continued, particularly between the Dominican Bartolomeo de Las Casas and his adversary J. G. de Sepulveda. Las Casas, in his Apologetica historia de las Indias, written between 1555 and 1559, defended the equal dignity and the unity of the human race.*

“There are no peoples on earth, no matter how unlettered and uncivilized, savage and barbarous, even sometimes similar to brute beasts, who cannot be persuaded and brought to a civilized way of life, and become peaceful towards others, provided that suitable means are used to this end and the way worthy of human beings is followed, namely love, meekness and forbearance, without ever abandoning this goal. This truth is based on what Cicero described in *De Legibus I*, that is, that all the nations of the world are made up of people who together and individually can be defined in only one way: as rational beings. All have understanding, will and freedom of choice since all are created in the image and likeness of God; . . . all know the rudimentary natural principles which allow them to understand, learn and come to know those things of which they are ignorant; this is true not only of those who have a natural inclination, but even those of whose depraved customs lead to evil; all rejoice in the good and feel pleasure in what is pleasant, and all flee from and hate evil, and feel displeasure at what is unpleasing and harmful [...] Thus the entire lineage of mankind is one, and all people are similar on account of their origin and nature; and no one is born learned; and thus from the outset we all need to be guided and supported by those born before us.”

#### Sources :

- The sermon of Montesinos is quoted in the work written between 1527 and 1562 by Bartolomeo de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, edited by Pérez de Tudela, Madrid, 1957, Book III, Chapter 3.
- The original Latin text of the Bull *Veritas Ipsa*, sometimes called *Sublimis Deus*, is found in: *America Pontificia I*, edited by J. Metzler, Vatican Press, 1991, pp. 364-366.
- The quotation of Las Casas is taken from Bartolomeo de Las Casas, *Apologetica historia sumaria destas Indias occidentales y meridionales*, edited by E. Gorman, Vol.1, Mexico, 1967, pp. 257-258.

#### Translation :

Mr Roland MINNERATH

Text 42:

**HOLY SEE**

15 May 1891

Pope Leo XIII

**Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum***

*The Encyclical Letter Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII “on the condition of workers”, of 15 May 1891, takes a position, on the ethical plane, regarding the social situation created by the first industrial revolution in Europe and North America. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, “Christian social” movements in the Germanic countries and “social Catholics” in France, Italy and Spain had called for a correction of liberalism by protective legislation and the promotion of workers’ interests by workers themselves. Advised by groups of experts from the “Union of Fribourg”, Leo XIII undertook to outline the principle of the dignity of the worker, and of his inherent rights concerning the safeguarding of his health and his entitlement to a “just wage”.*

**Dignity of work**

16 § 4. Workers are not to be treated as slaves; justice demands that the dignity of human personality be respected in them, ennobled as it has been through what we call the Christian character. If we hearken to natural reason and to Christian philosophy, gainful occupations are not a mark of shame to man, but rather of respect, as they provide him with an honourable means of supporting life. It is shameful and inhuman, however, to use men as things for gain and to put no more value on them than what they are worth in muscle and energy. Likewise it is enjoined that the religious interests and the spiritual well-being of the workers receive proper consideration.

**Safeguarding health**

33 § 1. Now as concerns the protection of bodily and physical goods, the oppressed workers, above all, ought to be liberated from the savagery of greedy men, who inordinately use human beings as things for gain. Assuredly, neither justice nor humanity can countenance the exaction of so much work that the spirit is dulled from excessive toil and that along with it the body sinks crushed from exhaustion. The working energy of a man, like his entire nature, is circumscribed by definite limits beyond which it cannot go. It is developed indeed by exercise and use, but only on condition that a man cease from work at regular intervals and rest. With respect to daily work, therefore, care ought to be taken not to extend it beyond the hours that human strength warrants. The length of rest intervals ought to be decided on the basis of the varying nature of the work, of the circumstances of time and place, and of the physical condition of the workers themselves.

33 § 3. Let it be the rule everywhere that workers be given as much leisure as will compensate for the energy consumed by toil, for rest from work is necessary to restore strength consumed by use. In every obligation which is mutually contracted between employers and workers, this condition, either written or tacit, is always present, that both kinds of rest be provided for; nor would it be equitable to make an agreement otherwise, because no one has the right to demand of, or to make an agreement with, anyone to neglect those duties which bind a man to God or to himself.

### **Right to a just wage**

17 § 1. Among the most important duties of employers the principal one is to give every worker what is justly due to him. Assuredly, to establish a rule of pay in accord with justice, many factors must be taken into account. But, in general, the rich and employers must remember that no laws, either human or divine, permit them for their own profit to oppress the needy and the wretched or to seek gain from another's want. To defraud anyone of the wage due to him is a great crime that calls down avenging wrath from heaven.

34 § 2. We are told that free consent fixes the amount of a wage; that therefore the employer, after paying the wage agreed to, would seem to have discharged his obligation and not to owe anything more; that only then would injustice be done if either the employer should refuse to pay the whole amount of the wage, or the worker should refuse to perform all the work to which he had committed himself; and that in those cases, but in no others, is it proper for the public authority to safeguard the rights of each party.

34 § 3. An impartial judge would not assent readily or without reservation to this reasoning, because it is not complete in all respects; one factor to be considered, and a factor of the greatest importance, is missing. To work is to expend one's energy for the purpose of securing the things necessary for the various needs of life and especially for its preservation. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen 3:19). Accordingly, in man sweat labor has two marks, as it were, implanted by nature, so that it is truly *personal*, because work energy inheres in the person and belongs completely to him by whom it is expended, and for whose use it is destined by nature; and secondly, that it is *necessary*, because man has need of the fruit of his labours to preserve his life, and nature itself, which must be most strictly obeyed, commands him to preserve it.

If labour should be considered only under its personal aspect, there is no doubt that it would be entirely in the worker's power to set the amount of the agreed wage at too low a figure. For inasmuch as he performs work by his own free will, he can also by his own free will be satisfied with either a paltry wage for his work or even with none at all. But this matter must be judged far differently, if with the factor of *personality* we combine the factor of *necessity*, from which indeed the former is separable in thought but not in reality. In fact, to preserve one's life is a duty common to all individuals, and to neglect this duty is a crime. Hence there arises necessarily the right of securing things to sustain life, and only a wage earned by his labour gives a poor man the means to acquire these things.

34 § 4. Let it be granted then that worker and employer may enter freely into agreements and, in particular, concerning the amount of the wage; yet there is always underlying such agreements an element of natural justice, and one greater and more ancient than the free consent of contracting parties, namely, that the wage shall not be less than enough to support a worker who is thrifty and upright. If, compelled by necessity or moved by fear of a worse evil, a worker accepts a harder condition, which although against his will he must accept because an employer or contractor imposes it, he certainly submits to force, against which justice cries out in protest.

Source :

The Latin original of the Encyclical is published in the series *Acta Leonis XIII*, Volume 11, Vatican City, 1891, pp. 97-144. The paragraph enumeration is taken from the collection *Le discours social de l'Église catholique de Léon XIII à Jean Paul II*, Paris, Centurion, 1985, pp. 19-65.

Translation :

The Church speaks to the Modern World (Ed. Etienne Gilson) Image Books, 1951  
p. 205-244



Text 43:

**HOLY SEE**

3 October 1953

Pope Pius XII

**Address to the Sixth International Congress of Penal Law**

*In October 1953 Pope Pius XII received those taking part in the Sixth International Congress of Penal Law. With vivid memories of the forced confessions of the Nazis and those of the Stalinist era which had just come to an end, the Pope recalled the legal norms which must govern the administration of justice, especially in what concerns the rights of defence and the person of the accused. In this regard he went back eleven hundred years and cited the recommendations made by Pope Nicholas I in 866 to King Boris I of Bulgaria regarding the way to treat persons accused of misdemeanours or crimes.*

**The right to due process**

The function of law, its dignity and the sense of equality natural to man require that, from beginning to end, punitive action should be based not on arbitrariness and passion, but on clear and established juridical regulations. This means first of all that, if one cannot wait without peril, a legal procedure must be followed, even if it is summary, and that in dealing with a crime, in order to secure justice for what has been committed, a trial must not be disregarded. To take vengeance for a bomb attempt carried out by an unknown person by means of sweeping with machine gun fire passers-by who happen to be on the street is not a legal process.

Even arrest, the first step of punitive action, cannot be determined by whim, but must respect legal norms. It is not permissible even for the most questionable individual to be arbitrarily stopped and imprisoned without further ado. To send someone to a concentration camp and keep him there without due process makes a mockery of the law.

**Condemnation of torture**

Preliminary juridical proceedings must exclude physical and psychological torture and the use of drugs; first of all because they violate a natural right, even if the accused is indeed guilty, and secondly because all too often they give rise to erroneous results. Frequently they lead precisely to the confessions wanted by the court and to the breakdown of the accused, not because he is truly guilty, but because his physical and psychological strength is exhausted, and he is ready to make any declaration whatsoever. "Prison and death rather than such physical and psychological torture!" Of this state of affairs We find ample proof in the show trials well known for their confessions, self-accusations and requests for merciless punishment.

## **Recommendations of Pope Nicholas I in 886**

About eleven hundred years ago, in 866, the great Pope Nicholas I replied in the following way to a question posed by a people which had just come into contact with Christianity:

“If a thief or a brigand is captured and denies what he is accused of, you maintain that the judge should beat him black and blue on the head and pierce his sides with iron tips until he tells the truth. But that is not allowed either by divine or human law: confessions cannot be forced, but must be spontaneous; they cannot be extorted, but must be voluntary. Finally, if it happens that, after having inflicted these punishments, you discover absolutely nothing on the charges against the accused, are you not then ashamed and do you not recognize how impious your judgment was? In the same way, if the accused, being unable to endure such tortures, admits to crimes which he has not committed, who, I ask you, bears the responsibility for such a godless act if not the one who forced that false confession? Moreover, we know that if someone speaks with his lips what is not in his mind, he does not make a confession but is only uttering words. Give up these ways and remove from the depth of your heart what you have had the folly of practising until now; indeed, what did you gain from those practices of which you are now ashamed?”

Who would not wish that, during the long period of time elapsed since then, justice had never laid this rule aside! The need today to recall the warning given eleven hundred years ago is a sad sign of the miscarriages of juridical practice in the twentieth century.

### **Right to defence**

Among the guarantees of legal practice there is also counted the possibility for the accused to provide a true self-defence for himself and not merely a *pro forma* one. He, as well as the counsel for the defence, must be allowed to submit to the court everything favouring his defence. It is inadmissible that the defence would be able to submit only what pleases the court and one-sided justice.

### **Impartiality of judges**

To the guarantees of law there also belongs, as an essential factor, the impartial make-up of the court of justice. The judge cannot “take sides” favouring either himself or the State. A judge who possesses a true sense of justice will freely renounce exercising his jurisdiction in a case where he could be accused of taking sides. The “people’s court”, which in totalitarian States was made up exclusively of party members, offered no legal protection.

### **Guilt for “war crimes”**

The many trials during and after the War, down to our own day, have given a particular dimension to this problem. In these trials the judge was to study, and still is to study, the case of those who ordered others to commit a crime, or who did not prevent it, although they could and should have done so. Still more frequently the question has been raised about the guilt of those who committed a crime only when ordered by their superiors or forced by them under threat of severe punishment, often even death. Very regularly in these trials the accused have called attention to this factor: they had acted only in

obedience to “superior authorities.”

Will it be possible to establish by international conventions, on the one hand, that superiors are juridically incapable of ordering crimes and that they can be punished for having given such orders; and, on the other hand, that subordinates are dispensed from obeying them and can be punished for complying with them? Would it be possible to eliminate, by means of international conventions, the legal contradiction by which a subordinate is threatened in his property, possessions and life, if he does not obey, and, if he does obey, by which he is afraid that after the end of hostilities the defeated party, if it reaps victory, will bring him to justice as a “war criminal”?

In every case, the moral norm is clear: no superior has the right to order an immoral action; there is no right, no obligation, no permission to carry out an act which is immoral in itself, even if it is commanded, even if the refusal to act entails great personal harm.

Sources :

The quoted passages from the address of Pius XII to the Sixth International Congress of Penal Law, 3 October 1953, are found in French translation in *La Documentation catholique* (1953), c. 1354-1356. The quotation from Nicholas I (*Nicolai primi responsa ad consula Bulgarorum*, Chapter 86, 13 November 866) is taken from *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Volume VI, Berlin, 1935, p. 955.

Translation :

Catholic Mind 52 (1954) p.107-118



Text 44:

**HOLY SEE**

11 April 1963

Pope John XXIII

**Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris***

*The Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII dedicated to peace in the world had widespread repercussions at the time. The world was living under a nuclear threat in the midst of the Cold War, one year after the Cuban Missiles Crisis and two years after the building of the Berlin Wall. At the outset the Pope affirms that peace can “never be established . . . except by the diligent observance of the divinely established order” (No. 1). Man is to discover this order “in the world of living beings and in the forces of nature” (No. 2). The laws which govern mankind are to be found where “God has inscribed them in man’s nature, and that is where we are to look for them” (No. 6). For the first time a Church document describes man’s fundamental social, cultural and civil rights as deriving from human nature itself. Just as interpersonal relations are founded on respect for an ethical order based on truth, justice, solidarity and freedom, interpersonal relations are also so established (Nos. 86-125).*

**Every human being is a person, a subject of rights and obligations**

9. 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. And as these rights and obligations are universal and inviolable so they cannot in any way be surrendered.

10. If we look upon the dignity of the human person in the light of divinely revealed truth, we cannot help but esteem it far more highly; for men are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, they are by grace the children and friends of God and heirs of eternal glory.

**Right to life and a decent standard of living**

11. Beginning our discussion on 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.

**Rights regarding moral and cultural values**

12. By natural law every human being has the right to respect for his person, to his good reputation; the right to freedom in searching for truth and in expressing and communicating his opinions, and in pursuit of art, within the limits laid down by the moral order and the common good; and he has the right to be informed truthfully about public events.

13. The natural law also gives man the right to share in the benefits of culture, and therefore the right to a basic education and to technical and professional training in keeping with the stage of educational development in the country to which he belongs. Every effort should be made to ensure that persons be enabled, on the basis of merit, to go on to higher studies, so that, as far as possible, they may occupy posts and take on responsibilities in human society in accordance with their natural gifts and the skills they have acquired.

#### **Right to honour God according to the sincere dictates of conscience**

14. This too must be listed among the rights of a human being, to honour God according to the sincere dictates of his own conscience, and therefore the right to practise his religion privately and publicly. For as Lactantius so clearly taught: "We were created for the purpose of showing to the God who bore us the submission we owe him, of recognizing him alone, and of serving him. We are obliged and bound by this duty to God; from this religion itself receives its name." And on this point Our Predecessor of immortal memory, Leo XIII, declared: "This genuine, this honourable freedom of the sons of God, which most nobly protects the dignity of the human person, is greater than any violence or injustice; it has always been sought by the Church, and has always been most dear to her. This was the freedom which the Apostles claimed with intrepid constancy, which the apologists defended with their writings, and which the martyrs in such numbers consecrated with their blood."

#### **Right to freedom in choosing a state of life**

15. Human beings have the right to choose freely the state of life which they prefer, and therefore the right to set up a family, with equal rights and duties for man and woman, and also the right to follow a vocation to the priesthood or religious life.

16. The family, grounded on marriage freely contracted, monogamous and indissoluble, is and must be considered the first and essential cell of human society. From this it follows that most careful provision must be made for the family both in economic and social matters as well as in those which are of a cultural and moral nature, all of which look to the strengthening of the family and helping it carry out its function.

17. Parents, however, have a prior right in the support and education of their children.

#### **Rights in the economic sphere**

18. If we turn our attention to the economic sphere it is clear that man has a right by the natural law not only to an opportunity to work, but also to go about his work without

coercion.

19. To these rights is certainly joined the right to demand working conditions in which physical health is not endangered, morals are safeguarded, and young people's normal development is not impaired. Women have the right to working conditions in accordance with their requirements and their duties as wives and mothers.

20. From the dignity of the human person, there also arises the right to carry on economic activities according to the degree of responsibility of which one is capable. Furthermore — and this must be specially emphasized — the worker has a right to a wage determined according to criteria of justice, and sufficient, therefore, in proportion to the available resources, to give the worker and his family a standard of living in keeping with the dignity of the human person.

21. The right to private property, even of productive goods, also derives from the nature of man. This right, as We have elsewhere declared, “is an effective means for safeguarding the dignity of the human person and for the exercise of responsibility in all fields; it strengthens and gives serenity to family life, thereby increasing the peace and prosperity of the State.”

22. However, it is opportune to point out that there is a social duty essentially inherent in the right of private property.

### **Right of assembly and association**

23. From the fact that human beings are by nature social, there arises the right of assembly and association. They have also the right to give the societies of which they are members the form they consider most suitable for the aim they have in view, and to act within such societies on their own initiative and on their own responsibility in order to achieve their desired objectives.

24. And, as We ourselves in the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* have strongly urged, it is by all means necessary that a great variety of organizations and intermediate groups be established which are capable of achieving a goal which an individual cannot effectively attain by himself. These societies and organizations must be considered the indispensable means to safeguard the dignity of the human person and freedom while leaving intact a sense of responsibility.

### **Right of emigration and immigration**

25. Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own country; and, when there are just reasons for it, the right to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there. The fact that one is a citizen of a particular State does not detract in any way from his membership in the human family as a whole, nor from his citizenship in the world community.

### **Civil rights**

26. The dignity of the human person involves the right to take an active part in public affairs and to contribute one's part to the common good of the citizens.

27. The human person is also entitled to a juridical protection of his rights, a protection that should be efficacious, impartial and inspired by the true norms of justice.

Sources:

In No.14, the quotation from Lactantius, a Christian author of the fourth century, is taken from his work *Divinae Institutiones* IV, 28, 2; that of Leo XIII is taken from the Encyclical Letter *Libertas Praestantissimum* in the *Acta Leonis XIII*, Vol. VIII (1888), pp. 237-238. In Nos. 21 and 24, John XXIII's Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* is quoted.

Translation:

David J. O'BRIEN. A. SHANNON, *Renewing the Earth*. Catholic documents on peace, justice and liberation. Image Books 1977, p. 124-170

Text 45:

## HOLY SEE

7 December 1965

Second Vatican Ecumenical Council

### **Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes***

*The Pastoral Constitution "on the Church in the modern world", approved by the Second Vatican Council and promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 7 December 1965, describes the mutual rights and obligations of the individual and of the human community at every level: family, municipality, cultural group, nation, world. In particular the Constitution insists on the ethical and juridical conditions to be satisfied by a State of law.*

#### **Public life today**

73 § 1. In our day, profound changes are apparent also in the structure and institutions of peoples. These result from their cultural, economic and social evolution. Such changes have a great influence on the life of the political community, especially regarding the rights and duties of all in the exercise of civil freedom and in the attainment of the common good, and in organizing the relations of citizens among themselves and with respect to public authority.

73 § 2. The present keener sense of human dignity has given rise in many parts of the world to attempts to bring about a politico-juridical order which will give better protection to the rights of the person in public life. These include the right freely to meet and form associations, the right to express one's own opinion and to profess one's religion both publicly and privately. The protection of the rights of a person is indeed a necessary condition so that citizens, individually or collectively, can take an active part in the life and government of the State.

73 § 3. Along with cultural, economic and social development, there is a growing desire among many people to play a greater part in organizing the life of the political community. In the conscience of many arises an increasing concern that the rights of minorities be recognized, without any neglect for their duties toward the political community. In addition, there is a steadily growing respect for men of other opinions or other religions. At the same time, there is wider cooperation to guarantee the actual exercise of personal rights to all citizens, and not only to a few privileged individuals.

73 § 4. However, those political systems prevailing in some parts of the world are to be reformed which hamper civil or religious freedom, victimize large numbers through avarice and political crimes, and divert the exercise of authority from the service of the common good to the interests of one or another faction or of the rulers themselves.

73 § 5. There is no better way to establish political life on a truly human basis than by fostering an inward sense of justice and kindness, and of service to the common good, and by strengthening basic convictions as to the true nature of the political community and

the aim, right exercise, and sphere of action of public authority.

### **Nature and purpose of the political community**

74. § 1. Individuals, families and the various groups which make up the civil community are aware that they cannot achieve a truly human life by their own unaided efforts. They see the need for a wider community, within which each one makes his specific contribution every day toward an ever broader realization of the common good. For this purpose they set up a political community according to various forms. The political community exists, consequently, for the sake of the common good, in which it finds its full justification and significance, and the source of its inherent legitimacy. Indeed, the common good embraces the sum of those conditions of the social life whereby men, families and associations more adequately and readily may attain their own perfection.

74 § 2. Yet the people who come together in the political community are many and diverse, and they have every right to prefer divergent solutions. If the political community is not to be torn apart while everyone follows his own opinion, there must be an authority to direct the energies of all citizens towards the common good, not in a mechanical or despotic fashion, but by acting above all as a moral force which appeals to each one's freedom and sense of responsibility.

74 § 3. It is clear, therefore, that the political community and public authority are founded on human nature and hence belong to the order designed by God, even though the choice of a political regime and the appointment of rulers are left to the free will of citizens.

74 § 4. It follows also that political authority, both in the community as such and in the representative bodies of the state, must always be exercised within the limits of the moral order and directed toward the common good — with a dynamic concept of that good — according to the juridical order legitimately established or due to be established. When authority is so exercised, citizens are bound in conscience to obey. Accordingly, the responsibility, dignity and importance of leaders are indeed clear.

74 § 5. But where citizens are oppressed by a public authority overstepping its competence, they should not protest against those things which are objectively required for the common good; but it is legitimate for them to defend their own rights and the rights of their fellow citizens against the abuse of this authority, while keeping within those limits drawn by natural law and the Gospels.

74 § 6. According to the character of different peoples and their historic development, the political community can, however, adopt a variety of concrete solutions in its structures and the organization of public authority. For the benefit of the whole human family, these solutions must always contribute to the formation of a type of man who will be cultivated, peace-loving and well-disposed towards all his fellow men.

#### Sources:

The texts of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) as well as the complete texts of the Church's twenty-one Ecumenical Councils are published in: *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, edited by Norman P. Tanner, 2 Vols., London/Washington, Sheed & Ward/Gerogetown University Press, 1990.

Translation :

Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils (edited by Norman P. Tanner) 2 Vol.  
London/Washington, Sheed & Ward, Georgetown University Press 1990