

*Primary Source Readings in*  
Catholic Social Justice

Jerry Windley-Daoust

Saint Mary's Press®

This book is dedicated to the Winona Catholic Worker for help with this book, for its commitment for doing justice in the Catholic Tradition, and for the inspiration the organization is to us all.



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The publishing team included Steven C. McGlaun, development editor; Lorraine Kilmartin, reviewer; Mary Koehler, permissions editor; prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the prepublication and production services departments of Saint Mary's Press.

Design Pics Images / Fotosearch, cover image

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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Windley-Daoust, Jerry.

Primary source readings in Catholic social justice / Jerry Windley-Daoust.

p. cm.

ISBN: 978-0-88489-968-6 (pbk.)

1. Social justice—Religious aspects—Catholic Church. 2. Catholic Church—Doctrines. I. Title.

BX1795.J87W57 2007

261.8088'282—dc22

2006030481

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# Introduction

This book isn't finished. Yes, I know it doesn't *look* unfinished—it's full of words, cover to cover. And not just any words, either, but words that are meant to change the world. You may have noticed that a lot of those words come from popes and bishops—they're part of the Catholic social teaching tradition.

What? You haven't heard of Catholic social teaching? Well, don't worry. . . . It *has* been called the Church's best-kept secret. Okay, crash course: Basically, Catholic social teaching got its start in the late nineteenth century as a response to the social problems created by the Industrial Revolution. You might recall from history class that mechanized production put a lot of people out of work, while those who found work in factories put in twelve- to sixteen-hour days for extremely low pay. Not surprisingly, the workers weren't too thrilled with this arrangement.

Before long, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were suggesting that the workers could solve their problems by taking over the factories, throwing the owners out on their collective ears, and getting rid of religion while they were at it. Quite a few people found those ideas pretty appealing, but a handful of Catholics thought they could do better. Calling themselves the Fribourg Union (because they met in Fribourg, Switzerland, every year), they tried applying the Gospel and the Catholic theological tradition to modern social problems. Pope Leo XIII liked their ideas, incorporated them into his 1891 encyclical *On Capital and Labor (Rerum Novarum)*, and voila, everyone lived happily ever after.

Well, okay, not really. But *On Capital and Labor* did make a difference, especially the bit about the dignity of workers and their right to organize unions. In fact, *On Capital and Labor* was such a hit that as new problems cropped up, the Church kept writing about them in light of the Scriptures and Catholic Tradition. That's what we call Catholic social teaching (or social doctrine), which the Church recently summarized in a neat little book called the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. The themes of each chapter in this book correspond to the themes of the twelve chapters in the *Compendium*, which is handy if you want to use them together.

Besides Catholic social teaching, this book is also full of words from people who took that teaching and ran with it. Folks like Marion Maendel, Kim Dae-jung, Sr. Helen Prejean, and Archbishop Oscar Romero are good examples of how the ideas in Catholic social teaching can change the way people relate to one another. Other folks, like Julie Hanlon Rubio and Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, extend the insights of Catholic social teaching into new territory. And a few, with their own ideas, have actually influenced the way Catholics do social justice.

Within these pages, you will also find ideas that might challenge the way you see the world around you. These moments when you are challenged are precisely the reason to be reading this book. The social teachings of the Church are not always comfortable, and they are most definitely not easy. By grappling with these truths, you will more fully understand the teachings of the Church and yourself.

But back to the business of this unfinished book. This book is indeed full of words, but they are not the sort of words that are meant to be read and then left for dead on the page like one might do with a mystery novel. These words will be fully spoken only when they take root in a compassionate heart, and come to life in loving actions. That's the way it is with the Gospel—alive, not dead on a page, always writing something new in the world. And it's someone a whole lot like you—yes, you (stop looking over your shoulder!)—who is called to write the next story of how God's love and justice take on flesh and blood in the here and now.

"Tell them how to use this book," my editor says. Okay, ready? (1) Read the words. (2) Figure out how those words might change you. (Answering the questions at the end of each chapter might help. Wouldn't hurt to pray a little, either.) (3) Go out there and bring the word to life in the world. (4) Stand back and stay alert—you might just witness a miracle or two.



**Mother Teresa**



# God's Plan of Love for Humanity

## Introduction

After graduating from high school, Marion Maendel set out to save the world. She started by becoming a live-in volunteer at Casa Juan Diego, a Catholic Worker House of Hospitality in Houston, Texas, that provides Christian hospitality to the local Hispanic community, especially migrants and refugees. She began her work full of idealism and self-confidence, but that quickly began to fade as her dreams ran up against the gritty reality of the people she served. A year into her work at Casa Juan Diego, a corporate executive she met on an airplane made a prediction: "In about five years, maybe sooner, you are going to burn out and quit. . . . You are going to run out of idealism first. You are going to become hard and cynical, and realize that people are cruel and thankless and undeserving s.o.b.s. And then you'll get a real job."

As Maendel relates in her essay, which is excerpted in this chapter, that is not exactly what happened. But the businessman has a point. At times, people definitely *can* be cruel and thankless and undeserving. So why should we do anything to help others, much less try to save the world? And if

### Second Vatican Council:

The Second Vatican Council was an ecumenical council (that is, a council of the whole Church) convened by Pope John XXIII in 1962 to find new ways of understanding and expressing divine revelation. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Council led to many changes in the Church, including its worship and relationship to the rest of the world.

we do try to make a difference, what will keep us from becoming hard, cynical, and burnt out?

Like Maendel, the Church is out to save the world. “The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well,” the Second Vatican Council declares at the beginning of its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*. “Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts” (no. 1). Motivated by this compassion, the Council went on to examine the various problems facing the modern world, and to offer principles for just and peaceful solutions.

If *The Church in the Modern World* had been a business plan, the corporate executive who warned Maendel might have called it impossibly idealistic and doomed to failure. But in carrying out its mission in the world, the Church does not follow a business plan. Nor is it driven by an idealistic belief in the power of humans to achieve true justice and peace on their own. Rather, the way it works for justice and peace is by cooperating with God’s plan of love for humanity. As the Council says in *The Church in the Modern World*, that plan sheds light on the true identity and ultimate destiny of every human person. It also reveals that people can overcome the effects of sin—including the world’s cruelty and our own cynicism—only with God’s help.

As you read excerpts from *The Church in the Modern World*, consider what each paragraph says about (1) who human beings are and (2) what they are called to do, in light of God’s plan. As Marion Maendel discovered, it is only in this light that we can begin to make things right, which is what justice is all about.

# Excerpts from *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*

by the Second Vatican Council

## Preface

### Humanity's Deeper Questionings

The dichotomy affecting the modern world is, in fact, a symptom of the deeper dichotomy that is rooted in humanity itself. It is the meeting point of many conflicting forces. As created beings, people are subject to many limitations, but they feel unlimited in their desires and their sense of being destined for a higher life. They feel the pull of many attractions and are compelled to choose between them and reject some among them. Worse still, feeble and sinful as they are, they often do the very thing they hate and do not do what they want. And so they feel themselves divided, and the result is a host of discords in social life. Many, it is true, fail to see the dramatic nature of this state of affairs in all its clarity for their vision is in fact blurred by materialism, or they are prevented from even thinking about it by the wretchedness of their plight. Others delude themselves that they have found peace in a world-view now fashionable. There are still others whose hopes are set on a genuine and total emancipation of humankind through human effort alone and look forward to some future earthly paradise where all the desires of their hearts will be fulfilled. Nor is it unusual to find people who, having lost faith in life, extol the kind of foolhardiness which would empty life of all significance in itself and invest it with a meaning of their own devising. Nonetheless, in the face of modern developments there is a growing body of people who are asking the most fundamental of all questions or are glimpsing them with a keener insight: What is humanity? What is the meaning of suffering, evil, death, which have not been eliminated by all this progress? What is the purpose of these achievements, purchased at so high a price? What can people contribute to society? What can they expect from it? What happens after this earthly life is ended?

The church believes that Christ, who died and was raised for the sake of all, can show people the way and strengthen them through the Spirit so that they become worthy of their destiny: nor is there given any other name under heaven by which they can be saved. The church likewise believes that the key, the center and the purpose of the whole of human history is to be found in its Lord and Master. It also maintains that beneath all those changes there is much that is unchanging, much that has its ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. And that is why the council, relying on the inspiration of Christ, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, proposes to speak to all people in order to unfold the mystery that is humankind and cooperate in tackling the main problems facing the world today. . . .

## **Part I**

### **Chapter 1: The Dignity of the Human Person**

#### **Women and Men in the Image of God**

Believers and unbelievers agree almost unanimously that all things on earth should be ordained to humanity as to their center and summit.

But what is humanity? People have put forward, and continue to put forward, many views about humanity, views that are divergent and even contradictory. Sometimes they either set it up as the absolute measure of all things, or debase it to the point of despair. Hence humanity's doubt and anguish. The church is keenly sensitive to these difficulties. Enlightened by divine revelation it can offer a solution to them by which the true state of humanity may be described, its weakness explained in such a way that at the same time its dignity and vocation may be perceived in their true light. For sacred scripture teaches that women and men were created "in the image of God," able to know and love their creator, and set by him over all earthly creatures that they might rule them, and make use of them, while glorifying God. "What are women and men that you are mindful of them, their sons and daughters that you care for them? You have made them little less than angels, and crown them with glory

and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet” (Ps 8:5–8).

But God did not create men and women as solitary beings. From the beginning “male and female God created them” (Gen 1:27). This partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between people. For by their innermost nature men and women are social beings; and if they do not enter into relationships with others they can neither live nor develop their gifts.

So God, as we read again in the Bible, saw “all the things that he had made, and they were very good” (Gen 1:31).

## **Sin**

Although set by God in a state of righteousness, men and women, enticed by the evil one, abused their freedom at the very start of history. They raised themselves up against God, and tried to attain their goal apart from him. Although they had known God, they did not glorify him as God, but their senseless hearts were darkened, and they served the creature rather than the creator. What revelation makes known to us is confirmed by our own experience. For when people look into their own hearts they find that they are drawn towards what is wrong and are sunk in many evils which cannot have come from their good creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as their source, men and women have also upset the relationship which should link them to their final destiny; and at the same time they have broken the right order that should exist within themselves as well as between them and other people and all creatures.

They are therefore divided interiorly. As a result, the entire life of women and men, both individual and social, shows itself to be a struggle, and a dramatic one, between good and evil, between light and darkness. People find that they are unable of themselves to overcome the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as if in chains. But the Lord himself came to free and strengthen humanity, renewing it inwardly and casting out the “prince of this world” (Jn 12:31), who held it in the bondage of sin. For sin diminished humanity, preventing it from attaining its fulfillment.

Both the high calling and the deep misery which people experience find their final explanation in the light of this revelation.

## Humanity's Essential Nature

. . . Women and men are not mistaken when they regard themselves as superior to merely bodily creatures and as more than mere particles of nature or nameless units in human society. For by their power to know themselves in the depths of their being they rise above the entire universe of mere objects. When they are drawn to think about their real selves they turn to those deep recesses of their being where God who probes the heart awaits them, and where they themselves decide their own destiny in the sight of God. So when they recognize in themselves a spiritual and immortal soul, this is not an illusion, a product of their imagination, to be explained solely in terms of physical or social causes. On the contrary, they have grasped the profound truth of the matter. . . .

## Kinds of Atheism and Its Causes

Human dignity rests above all on the fact that humanity is called to communion with God. The invitation to converse with God is addressed to men and women as soon as they are born. For if people exist it is because God has created them through love, and through love continues to keep them in existence. They cannot live fully in the truth unless they freely acknowledge that love and entrust themselves to their creator. . . .

## Christ the New Man

In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of humanity truly becomes clear. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come, Christ the Lord. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals humanity to itself and brings to light its very high calling. It is no wonder, then, that all the truths mentioned so far should find in him their source and their most perfect embodiment.

He who is the "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each individual. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human

mind. He acted with a human will and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin.

As an innocent lamb he merited life for us by his blood which he freely shed. In him God reconciled us to himself and to one another, freeing us from the bondage of the devil and of sin, so that each one of us could say with the apostle: the Son of God “loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). By suffering for us he not only gave us an example so that we might follow in his footsteps, but he also opened up a way. If we follow this path, life and death are made holy and acquire a new meaning.

Conformed to the image of the Son who is the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, Christians receive the “first fruits of the Spirit” (Rom 8:23) by which they are able to fulfill the new law of love. By this Spirit, who is the “pledge of our inheritance” (Eph 1:14), the entire person is inwardly renewed, even to the “redemption of the body” (Rom 8:23). “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, God who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom 8:11). The Christian is certainly bound both by need and by duty to struggle with evil through many afflictions and to suffer death; but, as one who has been made a partner in the paschal mystery, and as one who has been configured to the death of Christ, will go forward, strengthened by hope, to the resurrection.

All this holds true not only for Christians but also for all people of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for everyone, and since all are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.

Such is the nature and the greatness of the mystery of humankind as enlightened for the faithful by the Christian revelation. It is therefore through Christ, and in Christ, that light is thrown on the mystery of suffering and death which, apart from his Gospel, overwhelms us. Christ has risen again, destroying death by his death, and has given life abundantly to us so that, becoming sons in the Son, we may cry out in the Spirit: Abba, Father! . . .

# Acknowledgments

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The quotation on page 11 and the essay by Marion Maendel on pages 18–24 are from “Dorothy Day’s Pilgrimage Continues at Casa Juan Diego: The Pilgrimage Continues . . . Poor Teach Harsh and Dreadful Love: A Disillusioned Catholic Worker Stays On,” from the *Houston Catholic Worker* newspaper, at [www.cjd.org/paper/poor.html](http://www.cjd.org/paper/poor.html), accessed October 31, 2006. Used with permission of Marion Fernandez-Cueto.

The quotations on pages 12 and 44 and the Excerpts from *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*,” numbers 1; 10; and 12–14, 19, and 22, in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Edition, Constitutions, Decrees, Declaration*, revised edition, edited by Rev. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company), pages 163, 171–172, 174–175, 175–177, 180, 185–187, 189–190, and 180, respectively. Copyright © 1996 by Costello Publishing Company, Inc., Northport, NY. Used with permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. No part of these excerpts may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without express permission of Costello Publishing Company, Inc.

The quotation on page 28 and the section titled “Excerpts from *Justice in the World*” on pages 29–32 are from *Justice in the World*, by the World Synod of Catholic Bishops, numbers 6, and 1–6 and 29–38, at [www.osjspm.org/justice\\_in\\_the\\_world.aspx](http://www.osjspm.org/justice_in_the_world.aspx), accessed October 22, 2006.

The section titled “Excerpts from *Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements*” on pages 33–38 are from *Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements*, by Archbishop Oscar Romero, translated from the Spanish by Michael Walsh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), pages 73–75 and 79–80. Copyright © 1985 by Orbis Books. Used with permission.

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The excerpt by Pope John Paul II on page 44 is from Homily at the Trans World Dome, number 5, at [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/travels/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_27011999\\_stlouis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_27011999_stlouis_en.html), accessed October 22, 2006.

The section titled ““With a Human Being Who’s About to Be Killed”” on pages 52–57 is from the article “With a Human Being Who’s About to Be Killed,” by Sr. Helen Prejean, in *Peacework*, April 2000, volume 27, number 304, pages 6–8. Used with permission.

The section titled “Excerpts from the Message for the 1999 World Day of Peace” on pages 45–51 and the quotation on page 58 are from the Message for the 1999 World Day of Peace,” numbers 1–13 and 12, by Pope John Paul II, at [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_14121998\\_xxxii-world-day-for-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_14121998_xxxii-world-day-for-peace_en.html), accessed October 22, 2006.

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The quotations on page 62 and the section titled “Excerpts from ‘Building Solidarity: From Rwanda to the Asian Tsunami’” on pages 69–74 are from “Building Solidarity: From Rwanda