

on the person does not imply an individualistic view of human life, for a human being is called to freedom within community.

- 928 The mystery that is the person discloses the meaning of Christian freedom. This freedom is freedom from sin and from everything that enslaves a person. It frees him or her from everything that makes one dependent on external and internal compulsions, including the social structures of sin (defined below). At the same time, such freedom is a freedom to serve God and neighbour in love: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" (Ga15:13).
- 929 As a "new person" in Christ (see Eph 2:15), the Christian manifests this freedom in concrete areas of life, especially in social aspects. One is called to cooperation with Christ in all facets of human life. the behaviour of this "new person" in society flows from the gift of new life in Christ, and therefore the perfection and maturity of the person in the moral life is not only a result of his or her effort, but is also a fruit of unity and joint action with Christ in the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶¹
- 930 Freedom is always associated with a person's responsibility before other people. Owing to the reality of freedom in community, a human being is capable of manifesting social virtues (defined below) and building areas of cultural life that require the efforts of the entire community (art, scholarship, the economy, etc.).
- 931 The Church community brings dynamism to the life of society. It does this by proposing a direction for social development and perfection that surpasses the temporal horizons of human life. The most perfect model of a community of persons is the Most Holy Trinity. However, Christians understand that sin deforms interpersonal relations, gives rise to misunderstandings within society, and interferes with society's formation and growth in perfection. Every personal sin always has social implications. This leads to the emergence of structures of sin—social constructs in which a person is induced to commit sinful deeds. In order to overcome the structures of sin and build up society, Christians reject sinful actions and courageously witness to the good and to justice.

a. Democracy and Christian Social Virtues

- 932 Democracy—as a social system aimed at safeguarding the dignity of every human person and their rights, and also protecting a concern for

⁵⁶¹ See VATICAN COUNCIL II, Constitution *Gaudium et spes* [the Church in the Modern World], 19.

the common good as the criterion for political life—can be considered consistent with the Christian world-view.

the Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate.⁵⁶²

933 The existence of formal democratic institutions is not yet proof that democracy has been implemented. True democracy reflects the diversity of interests evident in society. When the democratic order is reduced to a collection of egoisms, society loses its high moral core: in such a society the human person is regarded primarily as a consumer and an object for manipulation. Such illusory democracy is incapable of safeguarding respect for the dignity of every person and facilitating solidarity among people. Where democratic systems serve only the interests of the most powerful, simply because they are more effective at manipulating the levers of power, democracy becomes an empty word.⁵⁶³

934 the foundation of the democratic system is respect for human rights, the most important of which are: the right to life, family, a formative upbringing and education, the ability to choose one's own path in life, as well as the right to employment, and the right to obtain the means for a dignified existence. A guarantor for the attainment of these rights is religious freedom, that is, the right to seek and confess the true God.⁵⁶⁴

935 The moral criteria of political life in a democratic society should become such social virtues as: responsibility, honesty, justice, mutual respect, diligence in work, truth, a sense of duty, solidarity, and concern for the common good. Democratic society requires moral values for its survival and growth. It is responsible to defend them.

2.1the Social Dimension of Christian Love

936 Christian love is the foundation of all interpersonal relations and all social life. It is precisely love that discloses the dignity of the human person and teaches us how to love him or her. Acts of mercy are the social manifestations of Christian love. The religious character of acts of mercy stems from the fact that Jesus Christ identified himself with every destitute person: "As you did it to one of the least of these who are

⁵⁶² Pius XII, Christmas Radio Message on December 24, 1944: AAS 37 (1945), 10-20. Quoted in JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* [One Hundredth Year], 46.

⁵⁶³ See JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* [The Gospel of Life], 70.

⁵⁶⁴ See Vatican Council II, Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* [On Human Dignity], 1.