

Exercising the Ecclesial Right in the Defense of Fundamental Human Rights (Canon 747 §2)

*Lester E. Mendonsa, JCD**

Vicariate of Southern Arabia, United Arab Emirates

Abstract: The Catholic Church enjoys the right to proclaim moral principles even in the social order and to defend fundamental human rights at all times (c. 747 §2). The papal prayer intention of April 2021 once again brings to the fore, the ecclesial right to safeguard human rights, those that have been agreed upon within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but continue to be violated. The article examines the social and ecclesial implications that are inherent in the exercise of the ecclesial right. This includes the participatory role of every level of ecclesial governance from the papal magisterium to the lay faithful to promote and defend fundamental human rights, and to denounce violations to human dignity and values. The text presents three pastoral indications in accordance with the norm of law and magisterial teachings, to promote the ecclesial right to protect human rights.

Keywords: Ecclesial Right, Fundamental human rights, Promote, Defend, Violations

Introduction

The April 2021 prayer intention of Pope Francis brings to the forefront the theme of the defense and promotion of fundamental human rights within the secular society. In his prayer intention, the Holy Father states:

*Lester E. Mendonsa STD, JCD can be contacted at lestermendonsa@yahoo.com.

Often, in practice, fundamental human rights are not equal for all. There are first, second, and third-class people, and those who are disposable. No, they must be equal for all [...]. Let us pray for those who risk their lives while fighting for fundamental rights under dictatorships, authoritarian regimes and even in democracies in crisis+-, that they may see their sacrifice and their work bear abundant fruit.¹

The ‘class category’ in the text of the prayer intention recalls in a fitting way, the first address of St. John Paul II to the UN General Assembly in 1979, where he stated:

Besides the acceptance of legal formulas safeguarding the principle of the freedom of the human spirit, [...], structures of social life often exist in which the practical exercise of these freedoms condemns man, in fact if not formally, *to become a second-class or third-class citizen*. [...]. It is a question of the highest importance that in internal social life, as well as in international life, all human beings in every nation and country should be able to enjoy effectively their full rights under any political regime or system. Only the safeguarding of this real completeness of rights for every human being without discrimination can ensure peace at its very roots.²

¹ Francis, “Prayer Intention for the Month of April,” *L’Osservatore Romano* 15, (2021): 8. It is not the first time that Pope Francis has insisted on the importance of people’s fundamental rights. In the encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti*, he denounced the fact that, “While one part of humanity lives in opulence, another part sees its own dignity denied, scorned or trampled upon, and its fundamental rights discarded or violated;” Encyclical letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, October 3, 2020, no. 22; English translation in *Origins* 50/21, (2020): 337. Also see the address of St. John Paul II to the diplomatic corps in 1989: “When the rights of the citizen are not respected, it is almost always to the detriment of fundamental human rights. The separation of powers within the State and democratic control are essential conditions for the effective respect of these rights. The fruitfulness of the notion of human rights is also manifested in the development and progressively more precise formulation of social and cultural rights. And the guaranteeing of these latter depends upon the extent to which their application is subjected to impartial verification. A State cannot deprive its citizens of their civil and political rights, even under the pretext of wishing to ensure their economic or social progress,” in *L’Osservatore Romano* 7, (1989): 2.

² John Paul II, “Address to the UN General Assembly,” in *L’Osservatore Romano* 42, (1979): 8. Emphasis not in the original. Also see the Pope’s 1989 annual address to diplomats, in *L’Osservatore Romano* 7, (1989): 5: “Undoubtedly there is interaction and mutual conditioning between fundamental rights and civil and political rights. When the rights of the citizen are not respected, it is almost always to the detriment of fundamental human rights. [...]. A State cannot deprive its citizens of their civil and political rights, even under the pretext of wishing to ensure their economic or social progress.” Pope John Paul II, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, December 30, 1988, no. 39; AAS 81, (1989): 467. English translation in *Origins* 18 (1989), 571: “The Synod did not forget the many brothers and sisters that still do not enjoy such a right and have to face difficulties, marginalization, suffering, persecution, and oftentimes death because of professing the faith. For the most part, they are brothers and sisters of the Christian lay faithful. The proclamation of the Gospel and the Christian testimony given in a life of suffering and martyrdom make up the summit of the apostolic life among Christ’s disciples, just as the love for the Lord Jesus even to the giving of one’s life constitutes a source of extraordinary fruitfulness for the building up of the Church” (hereafter *Christifideles Laici*).

Canon 747 §2 codifies conciliar teaching concerning the ecclesial right to proclaim moral principles in the defense of fundamental human rights in the context of the social order.³ Concerned about the violation of the fundamental rights of the human person, St. Paul VI, in 1972, in a communication to the United Nations' Secretary-General, Dr. Kurt Waldheim stated: "The Church, concerned above all with the rights of God, can never dissociate herself from the rights of man, created in the image and likeness of his Creator. She feels injured when the rights of a man, whoever he may be, and wherever he may be, are ignored and violated."⁴ Fundamental human rights besides being juridical norms are also human values enshrined in international and national declarations. Yet, these juridical instruments have not been able to lessen or eliminate mental perceptions and actions towards their protection. This demonstrates that the translation of law into social action can be a slow and difficult

³ Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, no. 76; AAS 58, (1966): 1099; English translation in A. Flannery, gen. ed., *Vatican II. The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, vol. 1, new rev. ed., (Northport, NY: Costello, Pub. Co., 1996), 797. Canon 747 §2: "The Church has the right always and everywhere, to proclaim moral principles, even in respect of the social order, and to make judgments about any human matter in so far as this is required by fundamental human rights or the salvation of souls." Unless otherwise indicated, English translations for the canons cited in this article are taken from Canon Law Society of America, *Code of Canon Law, Latin-English Edition*, Washington, DC: CLSA, 1983 and Canon Law Society of America, *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Latin-English Edition* (Washington, DC: CLSA, 1992). Also see International Theological Commission, "Propositions on the Dignity and Rights of The Human Person," in *Text and Documents*, ed. M. Sharkey, Vol. 1 (Ignatius Press, Kindle Edition, 1985), 256: "Certain human rights are so "fundamental" (Decl. 1948) that they can never be gainsaid without belittling the dignity of human persons. In this regard the International Pact of 1966 (art. 412) presents certain rights that can never be put aside, e.g., every person's inherent right to life (art. 6), recognition of the dignity of the physical person and the fundamental equality of persons (art. 16), freedom of conscience and religion (art. 17). Religious liberty may in some respects (the Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II, speaking to participants in the Fifth Colloquium *Juridicum: L'Osservatore Romano*, 11 March 1984, p. 6) be regarded as the basis of all other rights. Some, however, would claim this primacy for equality. There are other rights of a lesser nature (International Convention, 1966, art. 5.2) but also basically essential. Among these are civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights concerned with more particular situations. Indeed, in some sense these rights will appear at times as contingent consequences of fundamental rights, as conditions involved in practical application, and also as closely bound to actual circumstances of times and places. Consequently, provided there is no denial of the fundamental rights themselves, these lesser rights may present themselves as less immune, especially in difficult circumstances. Finally, there are other human rights that are not requisites of the rights of nations or strictly obligatory norms but postulates of an ideal of progress toward a universal humanization" (hereafter "Propositions"). John Paul II, Message for World Day of Peace, in *L'Osservatore Romano* 49, (1999): 2. "All human rights are in fact closely connected, being the expression of different dimensions of a single subject, the human person. The integral promotion of every category of human rights is the true guarantee of full respect for each individual right. [...]. When the violation of any fundamental human right is accepted without reaction, all other rights are placed at risk. It is therefore essential that there should be a global approach to the subject of human rights and a serious commitment to defend them. Only when a culture of human rights which respects different traditions becomes an integral part of humanity's moral patrimony shall we be able to look to the future with serene confidence."

⁴ Paul VI, "Message to UN Secretary General," *L'Osservatore Romano* 7, (1972): 5.

process. It makes the ecclesial right and need to announce moral principles more urgent and opportune. St. John Paul II, listing the fundamental human rights in his address to the UN General Assembly in 1979, affirmed the *ius ecclesiae* to speak out for individual freedoms and rights:

The right to life and liberty and to personal safety; the right to food, clothes, and a shelter, to health, relaxation and recreation; the right to free speech, to education and culture, the right to freedom of thought, of conscience, of religion as well as the right to confess one's religion in private and in public, by oneself and in a community; the right to choose one's lifestyle, to have a family and to have all necessary conditions for a family life; the right to property and work, to adequate working conditions and fair pay; the right to hold meetings and join in associations; the right to freedom of movement in one's own country and foreign countries; the right to citizenship and to a place of residence; the right to political co-determination and the right to participation in free elections of the political system of the people to whom one belongs. Not to satisfy these rights means very simply to scorn the dignity of the human being [...].⁵

Fundamental human rights belong to the social and moral orders. The Catholic Church rightly takes it up in the public domain. In the words of St. Paul VI: "A code could be composed out of the rights which the Church recognizes in man, and it will always be difficult to limit the fullness of the rights which derive from man's elevation to the supernatural by reason of his insertion in Christ."⁶ This article seeks to renew global attention to the ecclesial right for the defense of fundamental human rights, even if "Strictly speaking, human rights are not truths of faith, even though they are discoverable - and indeed come to full light - in the message of Christ [...], they receive further confirmation from faith."⁷ Therefore, the role of Church to exercise her right in the defense of human rights - from the Pope, bishops to the last of the faithful in a universal consensus - through her teaching in the light of Christ's divine message of salvation, is the main thrust of this article. The universal magisterium has always been a protagonist and leader in her teachings of the transcendental value of the human person and therefore of their fundamental human rights. In the words of *Evangelii Gaudium*, "If indeed the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics, the Church cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice."⁸ In the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* "all the

⁵ John Paul II, "Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations," *L'Osservatore Romano* 42, (1979): 9.

⁶ Paul VI, "General Audience," *L'Osservatore Romano* 24, (1968): 1.

⁷ Benedict XVI, "Address to the fifteenth plenary session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences," *L'Osservatore Romano* 32, (2009): 4.

⁸ Francis, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, no. 183; AAS 12, (2013): 1097; English translation in *Origins* 43/27-28, (2013): 450.

baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients” (no. 120).

The article briefly examines canon 747 §2 (CCEO, c. 595) which constitutes the canonical basis of the ecclesial right. It then elucidates in the first place, the social implications of participation, highlighted by the concepts of subsidiarity and synodality, and thereafter the ecclesial implications of participation in the role of the universal magisterium, the episcopal conferences, the teaching office of the bishops, the role of clerics, religious and the lay faithful in the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights in the Church. Finally, it provides some pastoral proposals for the effective exercise of the ecclesial right to proclaim moral principles as may be required by fundamental human rights given that “every threat to human dignity and life [is] felt in the Church’s very heart; it cannot but affect her mission of proclaiming the Gospel.”⁹

Canon 747 §2

The sixth guiding principle for the reform of the Code of Canon Law provides an indication of the mind of the Code commission to place canon 747 §2 at the beginning of Book Three under the title of ‘*De Ecclesiae Munere Docendi*’ in the context of the “*officium et ius nativum*” of the Church to preach the Gospel (c. 747 §1)¹⁰: “On account of the fundamental equality of all members of the Christian faithful and the diversity of offices and functions rooted in the hierarchical order of the Church, it is expedient that the rights of persons be appropriately defined and safeguarded.”¹¹ The Church preaches that created in the image of God, every human is a person with a body and soul endowed with fundamental human rights from conception to natural death.¹² The text of canon 747 §2 was taken *verbatim* from the

⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae*, March 25, 1995, no. 3; AAS 87, (1995): 404; English translation in *Origins* 24, (1995).

¹⁰ For the text of the principles guiding the drafting of the 1983 code, see *Communicationes* 1, (1969), 77-85. For an English translation see Roger Schoenbechler, OSB, “Principles Which Govern the Revision of the Code of Canon Law,” in *Readings, Cases, Materials in Canon Law*, ed. J. Hite, and D. Ward (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 84-92.

¹¹ J.P. Boyle, “Church Teaching Authority in the 1983 Code,” *The Jurist* 45/1, (1985), 146.

¹² Canon 747§1: “The Church, to which Christ the Lord has entrusted the deposit of faith so that with the assistance of the Holy Spirit it might protect the revealed truth reverently, examine it more closely, and proclaim and expound it faithfully, has the duty and innate right, independent of any human power whatsoever, to preach the gospel to all peoples, also using the means of social communication proper to it.” Also see R. Burke, “Communications and Justice,” in *Origins* 42, (2012), 2: “The first part of Canon 747, the first canon of Book V, enunciates the church’s duty and innate right, independent of any human power whatsoever, to preach the Gospel to all peoples, also using

Lex Ecclesiae Fundamental (c. 57 §2). The uniqueness of the canon lies in the sole mention of the expression “fundamental human rights” in the code. In the teaching of the International Theological Commission on the subject of the ecclesial right and its relationship to human dignity, we read:

This duty and right of God’s people to proclaim and defend actively the dignity of the human person is particularly urgent today because of the simultaneous appearance of two compelling factors: on one hand, there is a deep crisis as to the nature of human and Christian values; on the other, the modern conscience is profoundly sensitive to injustices perpetrated against human beings. The new Code of Canon Law (747 §2) speaks clearly about this obligation and right: “It is in the Church’s competence to proclaim the moral principles of the social order in all times and places and to make judgments on all human matters, when this is demanded by the fundamental rights of human beings or the salvation of souls.”¹³

Secondly, the primary source of the canonical text is the pastoral constitution *GS*, 76. The conciliar paragraph establishes the Church’s right to proclaim her social doctrine, and this is in harmony with pre-conciliar magisterial teaching that the ecclesial right includes the teaching, interpreting, and applying of natural law as moral law to worldly matters, and not limited to the ‘religious’ realm.¹⁴ The ecclesial right is permanent and universal ‘*semper et ubique*.’ Any violation of a fundamental human right is the trigger or motive ‘*quatenus*,’ for the Church to make moral judgments within a social order. As St. John Paul II teaches: “There is no need for the Church to confirm how closely this problem is linked with her mission in the modern world.”¹⁵ The ecclesial right is also ‘evangelical’ since it is intimately bound up with the gospel values as indicated by the 1971 Synod of Bishops, in its document ‘Justice in the World.’ The Synod stressed that social justice is a “constitutive dimension of preaching the gospel,” and that the Church has the right and duty to proclaim justice in the social, national and international spheres and to denounce instances of injustice.¹⁶ This is why:

The Church cannot abandon man, for his ‘destiny,’ that is to say his election, calling, birth and death, salvation or perdition, is so closely and unbreakably linked with Christ. [...]. Each man in all the unrepeatability of what

the means of social communication proper to it. It situates the duty and right within the context of Christ’s handing on of the deposit of faith to the church, so that she, with the help of divine grace, may safeguard ‘revealed truth,’ may study it carefully, and may proclaim and expound it.”

¹³ International Theological Commission, “Propositions,” 255.

¹⁴ Pius XII, “Address *Magnificate Dominum mecum*, November 2, 1954; AAS 46, (1954): 666-672.

¹⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Redemptor Hominis*, March 4, 1979, no. 17; AAS 71, (1979): 287; English edition in *L’Osservatore Romano* 12, (1979), 6 (hereafter *Redemptor Hominis*).

¹⁶ Synod of Bishops, *De Iustitia in Mundo*, November 30, 1971; AAS 63, (1971): 924; English translation in Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, *The Ministerial Priesthood. Justice in the World* (*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*: Vatican City, 1972-1973), 10.

he is and what he does, of his intellect and will, of his conscience and heart. Man who in his reality has, because he is a 'person,' a history of his life that is his own and, most important, a history of his soul that is his own. [...]. Since this man is the way for the Church, the way for her daily life and experience, for her mission and toil, the Church of today must be aware in an always new manner of man's 'situation.' That means that she must be aware of his possibilities, which keep returning to their proper bearings and thus revealing themselves. She must likewise be aware of the threats to man and of all that seems to oppose the endeavor "to make human life ever more human" and make every element of this life correspond to man's true dignity-in a word, she must be aware of all that is opposed to that process (*Redemptor Hominis*, no. 14).

The Catholic Church maintains that the biblical foundations of humans created in the image and likeness of God, is the basis for human dignity. The secular world also regards human dignity as the foundation for human rights without referring to the biblical root. The Catholic Church and the secular world both agree on the importance of human dignity, even though they differ on their views about the source of human dignity.

Social Implications

Participation is the key element when it concerns the common good of society. The pastoral constitution defines the common good as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people to participate either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily" (*GS*, 26). In context of the defense of fundamental human rights, the common good is served when members of any society, civil or ecclesial assist '*subsidiium*,' (subsidiarity) each other - both vertically from a superior to an inferior body or horizontally among themselves - and strive to work together (synodality) according to each one's ability and responsibility within society. Within the ecclesial society, the social implication of participation is characterized by shared responsibility for the sake of fulfilling her evangelizing mission. The social implications of participation have always been visible in the Church in the defense of fundamental human rights. To address concrete local situations, lower hierarchical levels have adapted the moral principles provided by the universal magisterium; while the latter works in consultation with the lower levels to 'listen' and to obtain relevant information about national and diocesan ecclesial life, with the sole motive of journeying together for a common salvific mission.¹⁷ In

¹⁷ Francis, "Address for the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops," in *Origins* 45, (2015): 382: "It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he "says to the churches" (Rev 2:7)" (hereafter "*Address for the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops*").

the Church, everyone contributes, either as an individual or in association, whether directly or through representation, to the life of the civil and ecclesial community, always from the perspective of the common good. The social element of participation is expressed not only by the authentic magisterium of the bishops, but also by pastors of souls and the laity and all those who are committed to proclaiming and preaching her divine and moral principles.

Subsidiarity

Subsidiarity in the context of the social order is the most constant and characteristic directive of the Church's social doctrine and has expressly been implied in Church teachings since the first social encyclical.¹⁸ The first explicit magisterial statement on subsidiarity occurs in an address by Pope Pius XII to newly created cardinals on February 20, 1946. The Pontiff takes inspiration from the social encyclical of Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno*.¹⁹ The Pontiff provides a glimpse of the capabilities of the faithful who are called to participate in the realm of their social life and its different dimensions. The context for the mention of the principle was based on the social rights of each person:

Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius XI, in his encyclical on the social order, *Quadragesimo anno*, drew from this same idea a practical conclusion; indeed he stated a principle of general validity, that is, that what individuals can do by themselves and with their own abilities must not be taken from them and given to the community. This principle applies equally for smaller and inferior communities vis-à-vis larger and superior communities. For, as the wise Pontiff went on to say, all social activity is by its nature subsidiary: it must serve as a support for the members of the social body and must never destroy or absorb them. These are truly enlightening words which apply to social life at all of its levels and also for the life of the Church, without prejudice to her hierarchical structure.²⁰

¹⁸ Leo XIII, Encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum*, May 15, 1891; *Acta Leonis XIII* 11, (1892): 101-123.

¹⁹ Pius XI, Encyclical letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, May 25, 1931; *AAS* 23, (1931): 177-228.

²⁰ Pius XII, "Consistorial Allocution," *AAS* 38, (1946), 144. English translation in *The Catholic Mind* 44, (1946): 196. G. Mucci interprets the papal expression "without prejudice to her hierarchical structure" in the text, as "excluding the applicability of the principle of subsidiarity to the hierarchical structure." See G. Mucci, "Il principio di sussidiarietà e la teologia del Collegio episcopale," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 137, (1986): 433-435. Mucci here seems to be answering the claim of O. von Neil-Breuning, that the phrase indicates the compatibility between the principle and the structure, O. von Neil-Breuning, "Subsidiarität in der Kirche," *Stimmen der Zeit* 204, (1986): 147-157. Refuting this interpretation, Komonchok argues that Mucci bases his interpretation on the model of the '*societas perfecta inaequalium*' that existed at the time, rather than the internal argument of the text itself. Instead, Komonchok states: "If, subsidiarity was incompatible with the hierarchical structure of the Church, the Pope would not be able to contrast the Church to imperialistic tendencies which deprive people of all responsibility and initiative!" See J.A. Komonchak, "Subsidiarity in The Church: The State of the Question," *The Jurist* 48, (1988): 306.

Nearly seventy-five years later, Pope Francis in a recent catechesis returned to the teaching of Pope Pius XII. Speaking on the theme of “Subsidiarity and the virtue of hope,” he calls for joint action and social and ecclesial participation by the faithful in accordance with their role in the Church and in society:

We must respond not only as individual people, but also beginning from the group to which we belong, from the role we have in society, from our principles and, if we are believers, from our faith in God. This principle has a double movement: from top to bottom and from bottom to top [...]. We cannot leave the people out of participation; their wisdom, the wisdom of the humbler groups cannot be set aside (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* [QA], 32; Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, 63) [...]. Everyone should be listened to, those who are at the top and those who are at the bottom, everyone. The principle of subsidiarity must be implemented, respecting everyone's autonomy and capacity to take initiative, especially that of the least [...] True change is done by everyone, all the persons that form a people. All the professions, all of them. And everything together, everyone in the community. If everyone does not contribute, the result will be negative. [...]. Let us not be afraid to dream big, seeking the ideals of justice and social love that are born of hope.²¹

It is evident that participation is the key concept in the involvement of the faithful in the social dimensions of their lives to bring about true change. The Pope emphasizes the need for all to participate in the social challenges of their lives and society in accordance with their capacities, while respecting the independence of each one, as if to say: ‘all are responsible for the social order but not in the same way;’ “As I have said, “it is not advisable for the pope to take the place of local bishops in the discernment of every issue that arises in their territory.”²² In canonical terms, the faithful have the right to “proclaim, and if necessary, defend” Christian teaching which includes the fundamental rights of humankind (cc. 229 §1; 252 §1; 384; 459 §1), and for the lay faithful “to permeate and perfect the temporal order” (c. 225 2§). Speaking to the bishops of the Philippines in 1990, St. John Paul II suggested that “Bishops also need to practice a *subsidiarity* which leaves ample room for the cooperation of priests and qualified lay persons in activities not strictly related to their pastoral office.”²³ In the words of Pope Francis: “Each person is called to contribute

²¹ Francis, “General Audience on Subsidiarity and the Virtue of Hope,” *L'Osservatore Romano* 39, (2020): 3.

²² Francis, “Address for the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops,” 384.

²³ John Paul II, “Address to the Bishops of the Philippines, *ad limina*,” AAS 82, (1990): 1399. Emphasis not in the original. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Vatican City, 2004), no. 189 (hereafter *Compendium*): “The characteristic implication of subsidiarity is participation which is expressed essentially in a series of activities by means of which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he belongs. Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good.”

with courage and determination, in line with the specificity of his or her proper role, to the respect of the fundamental rights of every person.”²⁴ The curial reform of Pope Francis has *subsidiarity and synodality* among its guiding principles.²⁵ The updated statutes of the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life, in article one subscribes to the principles of *subsidiarity and synodality* to be practiced within the Church.²⁶ The newly instituted Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development through her statutes is also tasked “to collect information and research in the areas of justice and peace, the development of peoples and the promotion and defense of human dignity and human rights.”²⁷ The task will necessarily involve the participation of the faithful and religious and secular institutes in the collection of social data for research activity for the defense of fundamental human rights. All in all, subsidiarity, understood as ‘*subsidium*’ has already begun to be visible in the ecclesiological fabric of the Church for the intent of a greater and common good and the *bonum ecclesiae*. The role of the magisterium, the episcopal conferences, the diocesan bishops, the clerics and religious and even the lay faithful in the proclamation of the moral principles either independently and/or with the hierarchy within the spirit of spiritual communion is therefore an integral part of the ecclesial right to defend and promote the fundamental human rights of peoples.

Synodality

The ecclesiological concept of synodality refers to the participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church, that is, all the faithful

²⁴ Francis, “Address to the International Conference on Human Rights,” *L’Osservatore Romano* 51, (2018): 8; The Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1929 (*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*: Vatican City, 1998).

²⁵ Francis, “Address to the Curia,” *Origins* 46, (2017): 504-505: “Some Guiding Principles of the Reform. These are principally 12: individualism; pastoral concern; missionary spirit; organizational clarity; improved functioning; modernization; sobriety; *subsidiarity*; *synodality*; catholicity; professionalism and gradualism. This involves the reordering of areas of competence specific to the various dicasteries, transferring them if necessary, from one dicastery to another, in order to achieve autonomy, coordination and subsidiarity in areas of competence and effective interaction in service. [...]. Here too, respect must be shown for the principles of subsidiarity and clear organization with regard to relations with the Secretariat of State and, within the latter, among its various areas of competence, so that carrying out its proper duties it will be of direct and immediate assistance to the Pope.” Emphasis not in the original.

²⁶ Francis, “Updated Statutes of the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life,” *Origins* 48, (2018): 59: “Article 1: The dicastery is competent in those matters pertinent to the Apostolic See for the promotion of life and the apostolate of the lay faithful, for the pastoral care of the young, the family and its mission, following God’s plan and for the protection and support of human life. For these purposes, in accordance with the principles of collegiality, *synodality and subsidiarity*, the dicastery maintains relations with the episcopal conferences, local churches and other ecclesial bodies, promoting exchange between them and offering its collaboration to promote values and initiatives related to the aforementioned matters.” Emphasis not in the original.

²⁷ Francis, “Statutes of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Development,” *Origins* 46, (2016): 248, article 3 §2. The entire Dicastery is divided into four operational Areas or Sections: Management; Research and Study; Pastoral Works and Diakonia; Migrants and Refugees.

are qualified to serve the Church through the gifts they have received from the Holy Spirit.²⁸ Synodality is basically the active participation of the diversity of qualities and charisms of the faithful for the building up of the kingdom of God. The Final Document of the 2019 Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazonian Region echoes the synodal and evangelical working style of the Church:

Synodality also characterizes the Church of the Second Vatican Council, understood as the People of God in their equality and common dignity with regard to the diversity of ministries, charisms and services. “Synodality is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission” that is to say, in “the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church” (ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2018, 6-7).²⁹

By working together and journeying together for a common goal and by respecting the ecclesial role of each baptized faithful and their respective ontological status and common condition, the ecclesial mission of salvation is better served (cc. 222 2§; 223 §1). Synodality reflects the social *diakonia* of the Church since “The Church’s synodal life presents itself, in particular, as *diakonia* in the promotion of a social, economic and political life of all peoples under the banner of justice, solidarity

²⁸ International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” in Texts and Documents (*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*: Vatican City, 2018), 66-67 (hereafter Synodality); Congregation for the Clergy, et al., Instruction *Ecclesiae de Mysterio*, August 15, 1997, Premiss; AAS 89, (1997): 852; English translation in *Origins* 27, (1997-1998): 391: “This call for the active participation of all the faithful in the mission of the Church has not been unheard. The 1987 Synod of Bishops observed; “The Holy Spirit continues to renew the youthfulness of the Church and has inspired new aspirations towards holiness and the participation of so many lay faithful. This is witnessed, among other ways, in the new manner of active collaboration among priests, religious and the lay faithful; by active participation in the Liturgy; in the proclamation of the Word of God and catechesis; in the multiplicity of services and tasks entrusted to the lay faithful and fulfilled by them; by the flourishing of groups, associations and spiritual movements as well as by lay commitment to the life of the Church and in the fuller and meaningful participation of women in the development of society. This was likewise verified in the preparation for the 1994 Synod of Bishops on Religious Life where it is stated: ‘Through all, there should be a sincere desire to instill an authentic rapport of communion and of collaboration between the Bishops, institutes of consecrated life, the secular clergy and the laity.’ In the subsequent Post-Synodal Exhortation the Supreme Pontiff confirmed the specific contribution of religious life in the mission and the building up of the Church.”

²⁹ General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, “Final Document of the Synod of the Amazon,” *Origins* 49, (2019): 502; “Preparatory Document for Synod on the Amazonian Region,” *Origins* 48, (2018): 124: “In the outgoing church (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 46), which is ‘missionary by nature’ (*Ad Gentes*, 2, Aparecida, 347), all the baptized have the responsibility of being missionary disciples, participating in different ways and in different spheres. Indeed, one of the riches of the Church’s magisterial teaching is that of ‘always and everywhere proclaiming moral principles, including those pertaining to the social order, and making judgments on any human affairs to the extent that they are required by the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls’ (Catechism, 2032; Code of Canon Law, Canon 747).”

and peace. God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between them.”³⁰ As Pope Francis explains: “only to the extent that organizations keep connected to the ‘base’ and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape.”³¹ It demonstrates the face of the Church, as a potent moral force to propose solutions to social situations in a structural political crisis to the detriment of fundamental human rights. In the context of the papal April prayer intention, it is the collective role of all *Christifideles*, ordained and non-ordained to work together, to exercise the ecclesial right to promote and defend fundamental human rights in a synodal way, by consultation and planning, by action and evaluation, by proclamation and a judicious use of the new media.

Ecclesial Implications

The Papal Magisterium

The Popes are aware that the scope of their competency task to proclaim moral judgments and principles on human matters is limited to the extent of what is required by fundamental human rights or the salvation of souls (c. 747 §2). This element is explained in more detail by Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est*:

The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet, at the same time, she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument, and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good, is something which concerns the Church deeply.³²

It however, does not limit the Popes to take their social and moral agenda in the defense of fundamental human rights to the international or public forum. Pope Francis was the fifth Pope - to exercise the ecclesial right in the defense of human rights to the general assembly of the United Nations - after his predecessors St. Paul VI in 1965, St. John Paul II in 1979 and 1995, and Pope Benedict XVI in 2008. He,

³⁰ International Theological Commission, “Synodality,” no. 119.

³¹ Francis, “Address for the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops,” 383.

³² Benedict XVI, Encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, no. 28; AAS 98, (2006): 239; English edition in *Origins* 35, (2006): 551. Also see Vatican II, *Declaration on Religious Liberty, Dignitatis Humanae*, ebruary 7, 1965, no. 6; in AAS 58, (1966): 932: “The common good of society is made up of those conditions of social living which enable people to develop their own qualities most fully and easily. It consists chiefly in the safeguarding of the rights and duties of the human person.”

Pope Francis addressed the assembly in person in 2015 and by video message in 2020.³³ Analyzing the content of these speeches in minute detail is beyond the scope of this article, however a brief examination of the theme of human rights in their messages would be appropriate. In 1965, as the first Pope to speak to the UN general assembly, St. Paul VI clearly informs the esteemed audience of the ecclesial right to proclaim moral and spiritual principles:

We know that you are fully aware of this. So listen now to the rest of our message [...]. The edifice you are building does not rest on purely material and terrestrial foundations, for in that case it would be a house built on sand. It rests most of all upon consciences [...]. The edifice of modern civilization has to be built on spiritual principles, for they are the only ones capable not only of supporting it, but of shedding light on it and inspiring it. And we are convinced, as you know, that these indispensable principles of higher wisdom cannot rest on anything but faith in God.

Fourteen years later, St. John Paul II in his message to the assembly, prophetically echoed the prayer of intention of Pope Francis in the context of the human values in the Universal Declaration of Rights, by stating that if the Declaration “was decisively subjugated by what is wrongly called political interest, but often really means no more than one-sided gain, and advantage to the detriment of others, or a thirst for power regardless of the needs of others,” it implied nothing less than “a destruction” of the Declaration itself. Repeating the sentiments in 1995, the Pontiff again stated that the Church had a right to voice her “serious concern when some people today deny the universality of human rights, just as they deny that there is a human nature shared by everyone [...]. If countries are able to offer respect for human rights, by replacing where necessary unjust, corrupt, or authoritarian forms of government with participatory and democratic ones, will they not in this way unleash the best civil and economic energies of their people? [...].” Pope Benedict XVI in

³³ Paul VI, “Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations,” *The Pope Speaks*, 20 (1965): 152; John Paul II, “Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations,” *L'Osservatore Romano* 42, (1979): 9. Benedict XVI, “Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations,” *Origins* 37, (2008): 747-750; Francis, “Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations,” *Origins* 45, (2015): 327-331; www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200925_videomessaggio-onu.html: “It is in fact painful to see the number of fundamental human rights that in our day continue to be violated with impunity. The list of such violations is indeed lengthy and offers us a frightening picture of a humanity abused, wounded, deprived of dignity, freedom and hope for the future.” J. Langan, “Human Rights in Roman Catholicism,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19, (1982): 67-68: “The Roman Catholic Church has stepped boldly in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) to develop a refined human rights theology and advocacy. The encyclical *Pacem in Terris* can be considered as the first official papal text explicitly dedicated to human rights. In reading the “signs of the times,” the Church perceived the need to proclaim the “universal, inviolable and inalienable” rights of all men, against any discrimination. The social encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, continuing in the perspective followed by the Council highlights the Christian foundation of human rights and shows how faith transforms their very inner dynamics.”

2008 continued the urgings of his predecessor by reminding the family of nations of their “responsibility to protect,” the human dignity and rights of each person because they “are based on the natural law inscribed on human hearts and present in different cultures and civilizations. He challenges the principle of (civil) legality where rights are considered “purely in terms of legality [...] divorced from the ethical and rational dimension which is their foundation and their goal.” The Pontiff posits nine reasons, as being the cause why fundamental rights are in practice, not considered equal for all, a topic that is also central to the prayer intention. The magisterial nine reasons have ironically become more acute today. They are: (1) the threat posed by cultural relativism (2) the risks of positivism (3) the unsettled question of the foundations of human rights (4) utilitarianism (5) selective approaches to basic rights (6) escalating demands for new rights (7) individualistic interpretations of rights (8) denial of the relationship between rights and responsibilities, and (9) the threat to religious freedom by dogmatic secularism. Pope Francis, in his address to the UN in 2015 continues the papal thread on the theme of human dignity and human rights, but within the context of social justice. In his 2020 video message, the Pope further provides three reasons into the purpose why political autonomies restrict the rights of individuals which he considers as “an attack against humanity itself.” These are (1) lack of respect for human dignity, (2) the promotion of ideologies with reductive understandings of the human person, and (3) a passion for absolute power and control. The papal messages at the UN general assembly have been a dynamic witness of the moral and spiritual identity of the Church in the world, an institution who without any temporal power nor material interest to compete, can exercise with moral conviction and authority (*Fratelli tutti*, no. 276), with her right to vindicate the basic rights of each person and their dignity for the sole reason of the transcendental element they possess. In this regard, the papal prayer intention echoes the mind of Pope Francis expressed in *Fratelli Tutti*:

If one does not acknowledge transcendent truth, then the force of power takes over, and each person tends to make full use of the means at his disposal in order to impose his own interests or his own opinion, with no regard for the rights of others. The root of modern totalitarianism is to be found in the denial of the transcendent dignity of the human person who, as the visible image of the invisible God, is therefore by his very nature the subject of rights that no one may violate (no. 273).

By returning to the theme of human rights in a public forum before national leaders and representatives and without being unduly concerned of the effects for speaking the truth in charity on behalf of all humankind, the papal magisterium is a constant witness and beacon of hope to the victims. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis has made it known that if “the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics, the Church cannot and must not remain on the

sidelines in the fight for justice” (no. 183). In the annual reflection of Pope Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia, he asserts the ecclesial right of the Church and therefore of the papal magisterium to affirm her moral voice in the secular world irrespective of unease from civil society:

If we tell ourselves that the Church ought not to interfere in such matters, we cannot but answer: are we not concerned with the human being? Do not believers, by virtue of the great culture of their faith, have the right to make a pronouncement on all this? Is it not their - our - duty to raise our voices to defend the human being, that creature who, precisely in the inseparable unity of body and spirit, is the image of God?³⁴

The papal magisterium considers the ecclesial right to proclaim moral principles and defend fundamental human rights includes religious freedom:

Even religious freedom, “an essential requirement of the dignity of every person [and] a cornerstone of the structure of human rights” (Message for the 1988 World Day of Peace, Preamble) is often undermined. There are many places where this right cannot be fully exercised. The Holy See defends it, demands that it be universally respected, and views with concern discrimination against Christians and against the followers of other religions.³⁵

For this reason, the compendium of the social doctrine and the Catechism of the Catholic Church are not static doctrinal teachings but a dynamic reflection of Church teachings that are updated and explained in more detail based on the signs of the times, when it especially concerns human rights.³⁶ For example, this criterion has been evident in recent times when the magisterium has declared:

³⁴ Benedict XVI, “Address to the Roman Curia,” *Origins* 35, (2006): 538.

³⁵ Benedict XVI, “Address to the UN General Assembly,” 749; Francis, “Address at inter-religious gathering, Abu Dhabi, UAE,” *Origins* 48, (2018): 607. Also see “Executive Order on Religious Liberty,” *Origins* 47, (2017): 34-35: “In 2017, the President of the United States passed an executive order titled “Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty.” It amends regulations, consistent with applicable law, to address conscience-based objections to the preventive-care mandate which had required in the past most religious employers to provide coverage of artificial birth control for their employees even if the employer morally opposes it. It also amended a 1954 order which bans churches and nonprofit organizations of all types from participating in partisan political activity at the risk of losing their tax-exempt status. The order states the Treasury Department shall ensure and “respect and protect the freedom of persons and organizations to engage in religious and political speech.” It calls for department officials to “not take any adverse action against any individual, house of worship or other religious organization” for speaking about “moral or political issues from a religious perspective.”

³⁶ R. Martino, “Presentation of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,” www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20041025_compendio-dottrina-sociale_en.html: “It will require constant updating [...] in order to interpret the new signs of the times.” *Evangelii Gaudium*, 182: “The church’s teachings concerning contingent situations are subject to new and further developments and can be open to discussion, yet we cannot help but be concrete - without presuming to enter into details - lest the great social principles remain mere generalities that challenge no one.”

- the inadmissibility of the death penalty as indicated in the duly amended text of article 2267 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church,
- her lack of competency and power to bless unions of persons of the same sex,
- the handling of delicate pastoral situations at critical and terminal stages of life,
- juridical and moral criteria concerning even the burial of the deceased, and the conservation of their ashes in the case of cremation,
- the morality of using some anti-Covid vaccines,
- the liceity of a hysterectomy in certain cases,
- certain bioethical questions, and even
- on matters of artificial nutrition and hydration to persons in a permanent vegetative state.³⁷

The authority with which the papal magisterium exercises its right as a defender of human rights, whether personal or social ones, is explained by the fact that her moral and spiritual voice is dictated by the Gospel teachings (*Fratelli tutti*, no. 277) and her salvific mission that is focused exclusively on the human persons and their environment.

Episcopal Conferences

The dogmatic constitution states that “episcopal conferences can today make a manifold and fruitful contribution to the concrete application of the spirit of collegiality.”³⁸ The decree on the pastoral office of bishops, exhorts bishops of a same nation or region to unite, to offer “forms and methods of apostolate carefully designed to meet contemporary conditions.”³⁹ The 1983 Code of Canon Law contains thirteen canons which concern episcopal conferences (cc. 447-459). Canon 447 reiterates the conciliar teaching concerning the scope of episcopal conferences to promote the common good in multiple ways. The apostolic letter *Apostolos Suos* enumerates the responsibilities of the teaching office of the episcopal conferences.⁴⁰

³⁷ See the website of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for details on the documents, (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/doc_doc_index.htm);

³⁸ Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, no. 23; AAS 57, (1965): 28; Flannery, 51.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Decree *Christus Dominus*, October 28, 1965, no. 37, in AAS 5,8 (1966): 693, Flannery, 981.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic letter, *Apostolos Suos*, May 21, 1998; AAS 90, (1998): 641-658; English translation in *Origins* 28, (1988): 152-157. The conferences of bishops were required to amend their statutes to implement *Apostolos Suos* (hereafter AS). Also see Congregation for Bishops, Letter, *La*

In the teaching of *Apostolos Suos*, one understands better the practical objective of the conferences as an organ which responds collectively to regional or national situations with statements for “the promotion and safeguarding of faith and morals, the defense of human life, of peace and of human rights, also in order to ensure their protection in civil legislation, the promotion of social justice” (AS 15). The code also recommends that episcopal conferences establish fraternal relations with each other “in order to promote and defend whatever is for the greater good” (c. 459 §1).

Consequently, regional episcopal conferences now include groupings of conferences to become the long pastoral and teaching arm of the moral authority of the Church in the defense of human rights or salvation of souls within a wider ecclesiastical network.⁴¹ These include for example, the European Bishops Conference (COMECE), the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC), the symposium of European and African bishops created in 2004 for pastoral solidarity, the German and African bishop conferences which meet regularly and issue statements concerning human rights based on socio-cultural crises that affect the two continents. Since 2003, the episcopal conferences of Mexico and the United States meet annually to coordinate pastoral strategy on the human rights of migrant workers and related moral issues. This North American initiative has recently expanded to include Central American Episcopal Conferences. The same applies to the groupings of episcopal conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), and the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA). In South America, the Consejo Episcopal Latin-American (CELAM) has repeatedly defined the regional Church’s social and moral issues for the sake of greater pastoral clarity and organic unity before the civilian governments.

More concretely and in the spirit of synodality, Pope Francis has utilized the statements and letters of the episcopal conferences to contextualize the lives of the particular Churches to his teachings, given that the papal magisterium is “not expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 16).⁴² The collective and prophetic

Congregazione, May 13, 1999; AAS 91, (1999): 996-999. F.A. Sullivan, “The Teaching Authority of Episcopal Conferences,” *Theological Studies* 63, (2002): 472-493 (hereafter “*Teaching Authority*”); The documents of episcopal conferences, regulated by the 1998 *motu proprio Apostolos Suos* generally reflect the religious, social and moral order of their regions on fundamental human rights or the salvation of souls.

⁴¹ F. Sullivan, SJ, “Teaching Authority,” 475-485. The author provides an exposition of the multiple groupings of episcopal conferences in the universal Church.

⁴² In the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis refers to statements from episcopal conferences and intercontinental episcopal conferences nearly twenty times *in toto*, both in the footnotes and in the main text. English translation in *Origins* 45, (2015): 113-151. In the apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis mentions the statements of six episcopal conferences, in *Origins* 43, (2013): 421-465. The apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* contains documents from ten regional episcopal conferences, in *Origin*, 45, (2016): 777-827.

moral voice of the conferences of bishops represents the mind of the Church within a spirituality of communion, for the sake of the defense of fundamental human rights within their local and regional situations. They have become a singular juridical and pastoral point of reference and a moral irritant to civil leaders, on matters of social justice, human dignity and freedoms by their ecclesial stance on behalf of and alongside those “who risk their lives while fighting for fundamental rights under dictatorships, authoritarian regimes and even in democracies in crisis,” as the April prayer intention reminds all.

The Diocesan Bishop

Every bishop is “a prophet of justice” called to meet the rapidly changing spiritual and moral needs of his people.⁴³ Episcopal ordination confers on him the right and duty to be the spokesman and protector for faith and morals in the local church. A bishop is always in the frontline for all situations of injustice within his jurisdiction. He is the guardian of the transcendent character of the human person, and a sign of their hope. (*GS*, 72, 76). His portion of the People of God is always the first *locus* for every social and moral crisis, for any violation to fundamental human rights or salvation of souls. In the words of Pope Francis, “the bishops act as authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church, which they need to discern carefully from the changing currents of public opinion.”⁴⁴ His understanding of the multiples social dimensions of the culture of his jurisdiction is a great asset to his teaching ministry given that he is constantly called to comment on public matters, to air an opinion on civic legislations that violate the moral law, to publicly reaffirm basic human values and fundamental human rights. In the post-synodal document, *Pastores Gregis*, St. John Paul II provides an insight into the sentiments of the synodal fathers concerning the differing moral and human rights issues in their dioceses:

During this Synod, we could not close our eyes to many other collective tragedies... A drastic moral change is needed... How can we keep silent when confronted by the enduring drama of hunger and extreme poverty [...] the flood of refugees and immigrants [...] the hopelessness of so many children and youth abandoned to life on the streets, the exploitation of women [...]: the list is not exhaustive! [...]. In many areas the world resembles a powder-keg ready to explode and shower immense suffering upon the human family.⁴⁵

⁴³ John Paul II, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, October 16, 2003, no. 67; *AAS*, 96, (2004): 915; English translation in *L'Osservatore Romano* 43, (2004): 15 (hereafter *Pastores Gregis*).

⁴⁴ Francis, “Address for the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops,” 383.

⁴⁵ *Pastores Gregis*, no. 67. General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris, The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for The Hope of The World* (*Libreria Editrice vaticana*: Vatican

Every moral and human rights crisis that vibrates in a diocese demands an episcopal teaching response that is reflective of the moral principles of the universal magisterium. This is why, a local is called to “stand in the midst of the Church as a vigilant sentinel, a courageous prophet, a credible witness and a faithful servant of Christ [...]” (*Pastores Gregis* 3). Susan Wood, in her essay on the bishop as teacher rightly characterizes this aspect of his role as “communal-dialogical” in nature.⁴⁶ In ecclesiological terms, the *munus pastoralis* of a bishop makes him a moral and religious figurehead of the local Church before the civil community and a beacon of hope to the faithful for the protection of their human rights.

Clerics and Consecrated Persons

In the words of *Pastores gregis* “A bishop is never alone: He is not alone in the universal Church and he is not alone in his own particular Church.” (no. 74). Speaking to the Synod of Bishops in 2015, Pope Francis acknowledges the principle of proximity and synodal flavor that the participative organs in diocese gives to the local Church: “The Code of Canon Law devotes ample space to what are usually called ‘organs of communion’ in the local church: the presbyteral council, the college of consultors, chapters of canons and the pastoral council. Only to the extent that these organizations keep connected to the ‘base’ and start from people and their daily problems can a synodal church begin to take shape.”⁴⁷ With clerics, consecrated men and women with their variety of charisms and the lay faithful with their groupings among their numbers, a diocese always reflects the social and ecclesial reality of the universal Church. Within a parish setting, a parish priest fulfills his role by reminding lay associations of their obligation to the criteria of ecclesiality which necessarily includes the defense of human rights (*Christifidelis Laici*, 30).⁴⁸ The apostolic and

City, 2001). For example, it interesting to note that in the forum for the synod - organized to discuss the *Lineamenta* - by the Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops, there was no single response concerning the *munus docendi* of the Bishops on fundamental human rights. The closest summarized response to the question “*What challenges do the socio-cultural elements in society pose to the ministry of the bishop, in particular to proclaiming the Gospel?*” was: “There is a gulf between Church documents and the reality of peoples’ lives. If we want to be credible in the ‘marketplace of the new spirituality,’ we will have to touch people personally and have something to say to their everyday concerns.” <https://www.cccb.ca/document/the-bishop-servant-of-the-gospel-of-jesus-christ-for-the-hope-of-the-world/>.

⁴⁶ Susan Wood, “The Bishop as Teacher: Proclaiming the Living Word of God in the Church,” *Revelation and the Church: Vatican II in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. R. Lucker and W. McDonough (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 9.

⁴⁷ Francis, “Address for the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops,” 383.

⁴⁸ *Christifideles Laici*, 60: “But for the lay faithful to take up actively this noble purpose in political matters, it is not enough to exhort them. They must be offered a proper formation of a social conscience, especially in the Church’s social teaching, which contains principles - of reflection, criteria for judging and practical directives.” Also see Directory, no. 41: “The priest cannot be satisfied with the laity having a superficial knowledge of the faith, but must seek to give them a solid formation, persevering in his efforts through theology lessons and courses on Christian doctrine, especially

pastoral ministry of clerics and consecrated men and women in the pastoral life of a diocese enables a bishop to better exercise his ecclesial right to defend fundamental human rights.⁴⁹ The place and position of consecrated women religious are also essential for the Church to exercise her rights in the defense of human dignity and human rights and “in fostering Christian doctrine and morals, family and social life, and especially in everything that affects the dignity of women and respect for human life [...] and promoting the fundamental values of life and peace.”⁵⁰ The ministerial value of religious persons in each diocese, in the expression of Pope Francis, is always “a spiritual capital which contributes to the good of the whole body of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 43), and not simply that of the individual religious families.”⁵¹ From a juridical perspective, they contribute to the “welfare of the Church and of the institute” (c. 610 §1; *LG*, 44) and this includes being the maternal face of the Church for the defense of the rights of the faithful with due regard to their own charisms and particular laws. Even the apostolic role of non-ordained consecrated members in matters which involve the political sphere and the working class/trade unions in the defense of human rights must not be underestimated. In this context it is worthwhile to highlight the conclusions of the 1978 plenary assembly of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes.⁵² Giving due caution to religious identity and the secular role of the laity in temporal matters, the Sacred Congregation in its plenary conclusions did not advocate a ‘flight from the world,’ but rather advocated a criterion of discernment for social action that revolve around “four great loyalties”:

- i. fidelity to humanity and to our times,
- ii. fidelity to Christ and the Gospel,
- iii. fidelity to the Church and to its mission in the world, and

through study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and its Compendium. Such formation will help the laity to expedite in full their role as Christian animators of the temporal order (political, cultural, economic, social).”

⁴⁹ John Paul II, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, March 25, 1996, no. 105, AAS 88, (1996): 481; English translation in *Origins* 25 (1996): 424: “What would become of the world if there were no Religious? Beyond all superficial assessments of its usefulness, the consecrated life is important precisely in its being unbounded generosity and love, and this all the more so in a world which risks being suffocated in the whirlpool of the ephemeral. Without this concrete sign there would be a danger that the charity which animates the entire Church would grow cold, that the salvific paradox of the Gospel would be blunted, and that the ‘salt’ of faith would lose its savor in a world undergoing secularization. The Church and society itself need people capable of devoting themselves totally to God and to others for the love of God.”

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 58.

⁵¹ Francis, Apostolic letter marking the start of the year of Consecrated Life, *Origins* 44, (2014): 487.

⁵² Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, “Plenary Assembly on Religious and Human Promotion, 25 to 28 April, 1978” www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc_con_ccsrlife_doc_12081980_religious-and-human-promotion_en.html.

iv. fidelity to religious life and to the charism of one's own institute.

On their part, consecrated and secular ordained clerics in accordance with canon 287 §1, are also called to defend fundamental human values or promote the common good short of playing an active role in political parties. In the words of Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis is able to deftly draw a line between active political participation and total; detachment from being interested in political matters, at least for the salvation of souls: "It is true that religious ministers must not engage in the party politics that are the proper domain of the laity, but neither can they renounce the political dimension of life itself, which involves a constant attention to the common good and a concern for integral human development" (no. 276). In this regard, canon 747 §2 echoes the teachings of the 1971 Synod of Bishops on 'The Ministerial Priesthood' which states that:

Together with the entire Church, priests are obliged, to the utmost of their ability, to select a definite pattern of action, when it is a question of the defense of fundamental human rights, the promotion of the full development of persons and the pursuit of the cause of peace and justice; the means must indeed always be consonant with the Gospel.⁵³

Commenting on the canon, the 2013 directory on the ministry and life of priests provides a pastoral rationale to the norm of law, when it states that: "The reduction of his mission to temporal tasks of a purely social or political nature, is foreign to his ministry, and does not constitute a triumph but rather a grave loss to the Church's evangelical fruitfulness."⁵⁴ As an alternative and in the context of exercising his ecclesial right to defend human rights, the directory encourages clerics to indulge more in evangelizing the lay faithful in the Christian faith on matters which inform and promote religious and moral principles, not excluding the social doctrine of the Church, adherence with the norm of law: "so that they (the faithful) may live according to this teaching, to proclaim it and if necessary to defend it." (c. 229 1§). The directory rejects any conception which looks to confer dignity and value to a cleric based purely on his activity in secular affairs.

The Lay Faithful

The lay faithful are constantly 'in the line of fire' to have their fundamental human rights violated. Lay persons are the face of the Church in the temporal world.

⁵³ General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *The Ministerial Priesthood and Justice in the World*, 1971. (www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf).

⁵⁴ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, no. 44 (*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, Vatican City, 2013): "The reduction of his mission to temporal tasks of a purely social or political nature, or in any case alien to his identity, would be not a conquest but a most grave loss for the evangelical fecundity of the entire Church" (hereafter Directory).

As witnesses of the Gospel, lay faithful need to be aware of “not only of belonging to the Church, but also of being the Church, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the head of all, and of the Bishops in communion with him” (*Christifidelis Laici*, 9). They are called to exercise the ecclesial mission in the world according to their condition (c. 226) based on the conciliar teaching that the secular character of their apostolate is vocational gift. In the interpretation of Cardinal Herranz, “The rich description of the apostolate of the laity is because the Council considered the temporal order as the “ordinary *locus theologicus* of their apostolic task, within and not outside nor on the fringes of the mission of the Church.”⁵⁵ Canon 216 provides the laity the right to promote or sustain apostolic action since they participate in the mission of the Church.⁵⁶ They have the duty and right of the lay person “to permeate and perfect the temporal order” is based on divine right itself (c. 225 1). This has been acknowledged by *Christifidelis Laici*:

In view of the moral challenges [...] endangering not only fundamental human rights [...] it is of utmost importance that lay Christians with the help of the universal Church - take up the task of calling culture back to the principles of an authentic humanism, giving a dynamic and sure foundation to the promotion and defense of the rights of the human being (no. 38).

In harmony with conciliar and post-conciliar teaching the lay faithful are called to distinguish carefully between those rights and duties which are theirs as members of the Church, and those which they have as members of human society: “Let them strive to reconcile the two, remembering that in every temporal affair they must be guided by a Christian conscience, since even in secular business there is no human activity which can be withdrawn from God’s dominion” (*LG*, 36) and again “The Christian who shrinks his temporal duties, shrinks his duties towards his neighbor, neglects God himself, and endangers his eternal salvation” (*GS*, 43). The Council has laid the foundation for the laity to be actively engaged in the exercise of their right to defend human values within the temporal sphere that is their social and specific domain for apostolate. The code has also shunned a clerical-centric narrative that would have contradicted the legitimate conciliar autonomy given to the lay faithful to involve themselves in the affairs of the world, to purify it from within like

⁵⁵ J. Herranz, “The juridical status of the laity: The contribution of the conciliar documents and the 1983 Code of Canon Law,” *Communications* 17, (1985): 299.

⁵⁶ Canon 216: “Since they participate in the mission of the Church, all the Christian faithful have the right to promote or sustain apostolic action even by their own undertakings, according to their own state and condition. Nevertheless, no undertaking is to claim the name Catholic without the consent of competent ecclesiastical authority.”

heaven.⁵⁷ Instead, the laity are to act according to their moral judgment as Christian witnesses in the world in the building up of the Church (AA, 25; c. 225 §2). The supreme legislator recognizes the right of the laity (i) to be free to educate the world in human values from within (c. 227), (ii) to associate (c. 225) within the parameters of the criteria of ecclesiality to add momentum to their apostolate in the defense of human right, and (iii) to exercise their ecclesial voice (c. 212 §3), even on matters that concern violations of human rights.

Pastoral Indications

The article concludes with suggested markers for a more robust exercise of the ecclesial right to defend fundamental human rights. The observations recognize the scope of the salvific mission of the Church and the political autonomy of civilian governments. In the insightful observation of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* the role of the universal Church goes beyond fixing civilian issues with solutions; rather in the spirit of subsidiarity and synodality, it falls upon the judgement of the local Church to consider all human matters that require ecclesial attention.⁵⁸

Educate Christ's Lay Faithful to Defend Human Rights

In the context of canon 747 §2, the role of the laity to defend fundamental human rights requires adequate catholic social doctrinal formation and instruction. This can be provided by the local pastors or by institutions with formal social teaching courses (c. 229 §1) including courses on forms of racial and religious discrimination and freedom of conscience, the pastoral aspects of the universal declaration of human rights, the causes that can impede the defense of human rights, etc. The objective to educate the lay faithful is based on the need to generate ecclesial consciousness among the laity concerning the stance of the Church on moral and social issues. The need for lay education in the social principles of the Church is not new. It was recommended in *Christifideles laici*:

⁵⁷ Vatican II, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, November 18, 1965, no. 2; AAS 58, (1966): 838. Flannery, 957; GS, 43: "The evangelical mission of the Church requires that even in respect to human rights, specific fields of action should be defined so that the layman may enjoy the freedom of action which he needs, and which is his due, and not look to his Bishops and priests for what they are unable to give. From priests they may look for spiritual light and nourishment. Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role."

⁵⁸ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 184: "In the face of such widely varying situations, it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution that has universal validity. This is not our ambition nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation that is proper to their own country."

This is especially true for the lay faithful who have responsibilities in various fields of society and public life. Above all, it is indispensable that they have a more exact knowledge - and this demands a more widespread and precise presentation - of the Church's social doctrine, as repeatedly stressed by the Synod Fathers in their presentations. They refer to the participation of the lay faithful in public life, in the following words: "But for the lay faithful to take up actively this noble purpose in political matters, it is not enough to exhort them. They must be offered a proper formation of a social conscience, especially in the Church's social teaching, which contains principles - of reflection, criteria for judging and practical directives (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction of Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 72), and which must be present in general catechetical instruction and in specialized gatherings, as well as in schools and universities (n. 60).

In the hierarchy of social values that the Church upholds, and in keeping with the right and duty of the faithful to promote or sustain ecclesial social action, the fundamental right to freedom of religion and conscience must take pre-eminence. The Church considers education in the spiritual values is pre-eminent over material values on account of the transcendent reality of each human being. By educating consciences, the Church exercises her right to form the faithful who can in turn be devoted to the promotion of other moral principles she upholds. This important educational aspect is validated in the teaching of St. John Paul II:

The right to freedom of religion is so closely linked to the other fundamental rights that it can rightly be argued that respect for religious freedom is, as it were, a touchstone for the observance of the other fundamental rights. The religious aspect, in fact, has two specific dimensions which show its originality in relation to the other activities of the spirit, notably those of conscience, thought or conviction. On the one hand, faith recognizes the reality of the Transcendence which gives meaning to the whole of existence and which is the basis of the values which behavior takes as its guidelines. On the other hand, religious commitment implies membership of a community of persons. Religious freedom goes hand in hand with the freedom of the community of believers to live according to the teachings of its Founder. It is not for the State to pronounce on matters of religious faith, nor can it substitute for the various Confessions in matters of organizing religious life. The State's respect for the right to freedom of religion is a sign of respect for the other fundamental human rights, in that it is an implicit recognition of the existence of an order which transcends the political dimension of existence, an order which belongs to the sphere of voluntary membership of a community of salvation preceding the State.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ John Paul II, "Annual address to Diplomats," in *L'Osservatore Romano* 7, (1989): 5; *Christifideles Laici*, 39: "Religious freedom, an essential requirement of the dignity of every person, is a cornerstone of the structure of human rights, and for this reason an irreplaceable factor in the good of individuals

Education of the laity in the defense of fundamental human rights must be initiated by the pastors. It constitutes an integral aspect of the missionary action of the Church at the local church level especially in catholic universities, colleges and schools. In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis acknowledges the good provided by educational institutions that have embarked on a curriculum that informs and transforms the lay faithful into acquiring adequate ecclesial consciousness of fundamental human rights:

The Catholic Church is considered a credible institution by public opinion and trusted for her solidarity and concern for those in greatest need. Again and again, the church has acted as a mediator in finding solutions to problems affecting peace, social harmony, the land, the defense of life, human and civil rights, and so forth. And how much good has been done by Catholic schools and universities around the world! This is a good thing (no. 65).

Lay persons in keeping with their specific apostolic character of secularity are the first agents of evangelization called to make the divine message known even in circumstances where only by them this is possible (c. 225). Even though lay apostolic action does not require legitimate hierarchical concession (AA, 20d), yet, as members of the community of believers with their pastors, the laity are called to put their faith education into practice and be in the forefront of civil society in the defense of fundamental human rights.⁶⁰ In the teaching of *Christifideles Laici*, lay apostolic action in the defense of human rights is urgent: “It is of utmost importance that lay Christians with the help of the universal Church-take up the task of calling culture back to the principles of an authentic humanism, giving a dynamic and sure foundation to the promotion and defense of the rights of the human being” (no. 38). Nevertheless, the lay faithful are not called to ‘go-it-alone.’ As envisaged by the Council (LG, 30; AA, 10) and the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, the laity require their pastors at all times and vice versa to enable them - within a spirituality of communion - to permeate and perfect the temporal matter more effectively: In the words of the exhortation, “Indeed, Pastors know how much the lay faithful contribute to the welfare of the entire Church. They also know that they themselves

and of the whole of society, as well as of the personal fulfilment of each individual. It follows that the freedom of individuals and of communities to profess and practice their religion is an essential element for peaceful human coexistence ... The civil and social right to religious freedom, inasmuch as it touches the most intimate sphere of the spirit, is a point of reference for the other fundamental rights and in some way becomes a measure of them.”

⁶⁰ GS, 76: “It is of great importance, especially in a pluralistic society, to work out a proper vision of the relationship between the political community and the Church, and to distinguish clearly between the activities of Christians, acting individually or collectively, in their own name as citizens guided by the dictates of a Christian conscience, and their activity in communion with their Pastors in the name of the Church.”

were not established by Christ to undertake alone the entire saving mission of the Church towards the world, but they understand that it is their exalted office to be shepherds of the lay faithful and also to recognize the latter's services and charisms that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart" (no. 32). The laity do not just belong to the Church, they are the Church immersed in civil society. They are called to be committed and responsible citizens and so they require adequate formation. Therefore, by educating them, it is logical that their apostolic action at national, diocesan and parochial levels will only enhance their capacities to organize and promote human rights campaigns. This can be done by means of speeches, workshops, seminars, webinars, leaflets, posters, handbills and streamers, lecture courses, sermons and catholic and/or ecumenical services. In the spirit of ecumenical collaboration and in conjunction with non-Christian associations, lay ecclesial action becomes more vibrant, dynamic and inclusive. This is why, Pope Francis calls for "every diocese in the world [to] have an ongoing collaboration with the people's movements." In recognizing the importance of spirituality in the lives of the people, we regenerate politics. That is why it is essential that faith communities meet together and fraternize in order to work 'for and with the people.'⁶¹

A Pro-active Stance to Denounce and Announce

At every level of the hierarchical pyramid, ecclesiastical authorities are ably assisted by their respective instituted offices and commissions. These bodies like the Justice and Peace Commission are called by their very nature to monitor violations to the moral law and fundamental human rights. As a result, statements are made based on a clear and right application of magisterial moral and social principles. This subsidiary work, in service of the apostolic ministry of the hierarchy is invaluable. It would be very difficult and even impossible for bishops to exercise relevant pastoral leadership without the support and dedication of these commissions and offices. The substance and form of the content of the statements are always to correctly denounce violations and announce what the Church considers morally acceptable based on the light of the divine message of salvation. However, it is not sufficient for the Church to

⁶¹ Francis, *Let Us Dream. The Path to a Better Future. In conversation with Austen Ivereigh* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 112; *Fratelli Tutti* 285. Also see R. Fleishman, "The Battle against Reproductive Rights: The Impact of the Catholic Church on Abortion Law in both International and Domestic Arenas," *Emory International Law Review* 14, (2000): 287-288: "At the Cairo Conference, the Vatican and allies such as Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Sudan, were able to effectively force 'the lowest common denominator on these issues, in the face of the fact that well over 170 delegations might have agreed with more progressive recommendations. [...]. In Beijing, just as in Cairo, the Vatican found itself allied with conservative Muslim countries on various issues.... During both conferences there seemed to be more similarities between the delegates from fundamentalist Islamic nations and the Holy See than delegates from other sovereigns."

exercise her right by adopting a reactive stance post-casualty. Rather, it is necessary that the regional and local levels of the hierarchy, always and everywhere pro-actively and in a preventative manner exercise her leadership as a loving mother to repeatedly proclaim moral principles in the defense of fundamental human rights irrespective of its relevance at that period of time in their social environments. By adopting a pro-active stance, the topic of fundamental human rights is always in the public forum. In this regard, it is proposed that at suitable liturgical or social moments in the year, irrespective of crises, the hierarchy pro-actively utilizes social communications/new media (c. 747 §1), to publish statements or pastoral letters, which in turn can create consciousness among the faithful and persons of goodwill, of the preciousness of human values and the ecclesial right to defend them for unless this “basic principle” is upheld, there could be no future for humanity. In the spirit of the encyclical ‘*Fratelli tutti*,’ joint action with other Churches and ecclesial communities and non-Christian faiths and groups, the local Church will be able to maintain public consciousness more broadly and at all times to denouncing violations and social injustices, and proclaim the truth.

Change of Title

In the light of the roman curial reform and the apostolic letter issued *motu proprio* by Pope Francis, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace⁶² is now an integral part of the Dicastery “For Promoting Integral Human Development.”⁶³ This change of title is a juridical and social indication of the spiritual leadership and governing style of Pope Francis. It reflects the signs of the times. The amalgamation of four bodies all of which were directly or indirectly involved with human rights and social action into a new dicastery for promoting integral human development is clear pro-active stance of the ecclesial right, to efficaciously and pro-actively address the needs of the men and women to whom the Church is called to serve. To reflect the papal style of governance, it would be appropriate - not for uniformity sake - but rather for a united universal proactive ecclesial stance, that lower levels of ecclesial governing bodies such as the episcopal conferences and local dioceses mirror the magisterial mind with an appropriate change of title in keeping with the signs of the times. Presently, for example, the names of the commissions of some global episcopal conferences range from a mere ‘Justice and Peace’ to ‘Social Justice’ and even ‘Social

⁶² While the profile and activities of the Pontifical Council were triune: justice, peace and human rights, the title reflected only the first two, and implied the third. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_pro_20011004_en.html.

⁶³ Francis, Apostolic letter issued *motu proprio Humanam Progressionem*, 17 August 2016; English translation in *Origins* 46, (2016): 248 (hereafter *Humanam Progressionem*). The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, and the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers are now merged into one body.

Action.⁶⁴ The need for a change of title is essential to clearly reflect more closely the social dynamism of the new century, and the need to demonstrate the ecclesial right for integral human development in the defense of human dignity and rights. A change of title is vindicated by the *motu proprio Humanam Progressionem*: “In all her being and actions, the Church is called to promote the integral development of the human person in the light of the Gospel, [...] is continuously adapting the institutions, so that they may better meet the needs of the men and women whom they are called to serve” (Introduction).⁶⁵ The dicastery is also called to “encourage and coordinate initiatives of Catholic institutions committed to respecting the dignity of every person.”⁶⁶ Give that human dignity is the motive for the Church to exercise her right in the protection of the rights of each person, a change of title would necessitate a up-to-date set of guidelines that correspond to the nature and mission of the Church to proclaim moral principles on all human matters, and when required to defend fundamental human rights or the salvation of souls.

Conclusion

The basis of Catholic social teaching is the dignity of the human person. It is impossible for the Church to separate the promotion of social justice from the recognition of the culture and values of peoples. This is an indispensable part of the evangelizing mission of the Church and therefore of her ecclesial right. The competence of the Church to proclaim moral principles in the defense of human rights is based on divine revelation and natural law. It is a right that is in harmony with her very salvific mission. To reiterate the teaching of St. John Paul II, “The Church can in no way allow any ideology or political current to snatch away the banner of justice, for it is one of the primary demands of the Gospel and at the same time a fruit of the coming of God’s kingdom.”⁶⁷ Yet, in the spirit of subsidiarity and synodality, it is the right of each level of the hierarchical pyramid to proactively announce to the faithful and civil society of the truths about human dignity and rights. It is also their prerogative to denounce violations that affect society especially those that

⁶⁴ The USCCB has amended the title of the commission to read as ‘Justice, Peace and Human Development.’ In Canada the commission is titled Justice and Peace and in its mandate also addresses the protection of religious freedom and of other fundamental human rights. In Australia, the commission is titled ‘Social Justice, Mission and Service.’ In the Council of the Bishops’ Conferences of Europe, it is ‘Pastoral Social Work’ that is tasked in the defense of human rights and the common good, promoting social cohesion and non-discrimination in Europe, so as to establish a network of collaboration between the different institutions to defend life and human dignity, the rights and fundamental freedoms of the human person.” The Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales it is called ‘Department of Social Justice,’ and the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines it is the ‘Commission on Social Action, Justice and Peace.’

⁶⁵ Emphasis not in the original.

⁶⁶ “*Humanam Progressionem*”, article 3 §4.

⁶⁷ John Paul II, “Address to the Fourth General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate,” *L’Osservatore Romano* 23, (1992):8.

occur within their own ecclesiastical jurisdictions. To ensure that the exercise of the ecclesial right is not limited to pastors only, it is the duty of the lay faithful to present and defend to the secular world the basic truths that have their source in of natural law and confirmed in the light of the divine message. In the words of Pope Francis, “As a church that ‘journeys together’ with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity.”⁶⁸ **PS**

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