

Lay Catholics are Responsible for Social Action

From **Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church**: printed 2004

Preface, paragraph 4, page xviii

Contemporary cultural and social issues involve above all the lay faithful, who are called, as the Second Vatican Council reminds us, to deal with temporal affairs and order them according to God's will (cf. Lumen Gentium, 31). We can therefore easily understand the fundamental importance of the formation of the laity, so that the holiness of their lives and the strength of their witness will contribute to human progress. This document intends to help them in this daily mission.

Moreover, it is interesting to note how the many elements brought together here are shared by other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, as well as by other Religions. The text has been presented in such a way as to be useful not only from within (ab intra), that is among Catholics, but also from outside (ab extra). In fact, those who share the same Baptism with us, as well as the followers of other Religions and all people of good will, can find herein fruitful occasions for reflection and a common motivation for the integral development of every person and the whole person.

Chapter Two, paragraph 83, page 37

The first recipient of the Church's social doctrine is the Church community in its entire membership, because everyone has social responsibilities that must be fulfilled. The conscience is called by this social teaching to recognize and fulfil the obligations of justice and charity in society. This doctrine is a light of moral truth that inspires appropriate responses according to the vocation and ministry of each Christian. In the tasks of evangelization, that is to say, of teaching, catechesis and formation that the Church's social doctrine inspires, it is addressed to every Christian, each according to the competence, charisms, office and mission of proclamation that is proper to each one.¹²⁷

*This social doctrine implies as well responsibilities regarding the building, organization and functioning of society, that is to say, political, economic and administrative obligations — obligations of a secular nature — which belong to the lay faithful, not to priests or religious.*¹²⁸ These responsibilities belong to the laity in a distinctive manner, by reason of the *secular condition of their state of life, and of the secular nature of their vocation.*¹²⁹ By fulfilling these

responsibilities, the lay faithful put the Church's social teaching into action and thus fulfil the Church's secular mission.¹³⁰

Chapter Twelve, paragraph 531, page 233

*The Church's social doctrine must be the basis of an intense and constant work of formation, especially of the lay faithful. Such a formation should take into account their obligations in civil society. "It belongs to the layman, without waiting passively for orders and directives, to take the initiative freely and to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which they live."*¹¹²⁹ *The first level* of the formation of lay Christians should be to help them to become capable of meeting their daily activities effectively in the cultural, social, economic and political spheres and to develop in them a sense of duty that is at the service of the common good.¹¹³⁰ *A second level* concerns the formation of a political conscience in order to prepare lay Christians to exercise political power. "Those with a talent for the difficult yet noble art of politics, or whose talents in this matter can be developed, should prepare themselves for it, and forgetting their own convenience and material interests, they should engage in political activity."¹¹³¹

Chapter Twelve, SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND ECCLESIAL ACTION, is devoted in particular to what foundation and actions should be expected of the lay faithful.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility

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"The work for justice requires that the mind and heart of Catholics be educated and informed to know and practice the whole faith." - **Page 2 paragraph 4**

"We recognize that *the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual* in light of a properly formed conscience, and that *participation goes well beyond casting a vote* in a particular election." - **Page 2 paragraph 7**