

COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Chapter Ten: passages from the Document

SAFEGUARDING THE ENVIRONMENT

I. BIBLICAL ASPECTS	* <i>The living experience of the divine presence in history is the foundation of the faith of the people of God:</i> “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand” (<i>Deut</i> 6:21). A look at history permits one to have an overview of the past and discover God at work from the very beginning: “A wandering Aramean was my father” (<i>Deut</i> 26:5); of his people God can say: “I took your father Abraham from beyond the river” (<i>Josh</i> 24:3). This reflection permits us to look to the future with hope, sustained by the promise and the covenant that God continually renews. <i>The faith of Israel is lived out in the space and time of this world, perceived not as a hostile environment, nor as an evil from which one must be freed, but rather as the gift itself of God, as the place and plan that he entrusts to the responsible management and activity of man.</i> Nature, the work of God’s creative action, is not a dangerous adversary. It is God who made all things, and with regard to each created reality “God saw that it was good” (cf. <i>Gen</i> 1:4,10,12,18,21,25). At the summit of this creation, which “was very good” (<i>Gen</i> 1:31), God placed man. Only man and woman, among all creatures, were made by God “in his own image” (<i>Gen</i> 1,27). The Lord entrusted all of creation to their responsibility, charging them to care for its harmony and development (cf. <i>Gen</i> 1:26-30). This special bond with God explains the privileged position of the first human couple in the order of creation. (451) * The relationship of man with the world is a constitutive part of his human identity. This relationship is in turn the result of another still deeper relationship between man and God. <i>Creation is always an object of praise in Israel’s prayer:</i> “O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all” (<i>Pss</i> 104:24). Salvation is perceived as a new creation that re-establishes that harmony and potential for growth that sin had compromised: “I create new heavens and a new earth” (<i>Is</i> 65:17) — says the Lord — in which “the wilderness becomes a fruitful field ... and righteousness [will]
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	abide in the fruitful field ... My people will abide in a peaceful habitation” (Is 32:15-18). (452) * The definitive salvation that God offers to all humanity through his own Son does not come about outside of this world. While wounded by sin, the world is destined to undergo a radical purification (cf. 2 Pet 3:10) that will make it a renewed world (cf. Is 65:17, 66:22; Rev 21:1), finally becoming the place where “righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13). <i>In his public ministry, Jesus makes use of natural elements.</i> He asks his disciples to look at things, at the seasons and at people with the trust of children who know that they will never be abandoned by a provident Father (cf. Lk 11:11-13). Far from being enslaved by things, the disciple of Jesus must know how to use them in order to bring about sharing and brotherhood (cf. Lk 16:9-13). (453) * The entrance of Jesus Christ into the history of the world reaches its culmination in the Paschal Mystery, where nature itself takes part in the drama of the rejection of the Son of God and in the victory of his Resurrection (cf. Mt 27:45, 51, 28:2). Crossing through death and grafting onto it the new splendour of the Resurrection, Jesus inaugurates a new world in which everything is subjected to him (cf. 1 Cor 15:20-28) and he creates anew those relationships of order and harmony that sin had destroyed. Nature, which was created in the Word is, by the same Word made flesh, reconciled to God and given new peace (cf. Col 1:15-20). (454) * Not only is the inner man made whole once more, but his entire nature as a corporeal being is touched by the redeeming power of Christ. The whole of creation participates in the renewal flowing from the Lord's Paschal Mystery, although it still awaits full liberation from corruption, groaning in travail (cf. Rom 8:19-23), in expectation of giving birth to “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1) that are the gift of the end of time, the fulfilment of salvation. (455)
II. MAN AND THE UNIVERSE OF CREATED THINGS	* The biblical vision inspires the behaviour of Christians in relation to their use of the earth, and also with regard to the advances of science and technology. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that man “judges rightly that by his intellect he surpasses the material universe, for he shares in the light of the divine mind”. The Council Fathers recognized the progress made thanks to the tireless application of human genius down the centuries, whether in the empirical sciences, the technological disciplines or the liberal arts[947]. Today, “especially with the help of science and technology, man has extended his mastery over nearly the whole of nature and continues to do so”. (456)

	* <i>The results of science and technology are, in themselves, positive.</i> “Far from thinking that works produced by man's own talent and energy are in opposition to God's power, and that the rational creature exists as a kind of rival to the Creator, Christians are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's grace and the flowering of His own mysterious design.” (457) * <i>The Magisterium's considerations regarding science and technology in general can also be applied to the environment and agriculture.</i> The Church appreciates “the advantages that result — and can still result — from the study and applications of molecular biology, supplemented by other disciplines such as genetics and its technological application in agriculture and industry”. Scientists, therefore, must “truly use their research and technical skill in the service of humanity”, being able to subordinate them “to moral principles and values, which respect and realize in its fullness the dignity of man.” (458) * <i>A central point of reference for every scientific and technological application is respect for men and women, which must also be accompanied by a necessary attitude of respect for other living creatures.</i> Even when thought is given to making some change in them, “one must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system”. In this sense, the formidable possibilities of biological research raise grave concerns, in that “we are not yet in a position to assess the biological disturbance that could result from indiscriminate genetic manipulation and from the unscrupulous development of new forms of plant and animal life, to say nothing of unacceptable experimentation regarding the origins of human life itself”. (459) * Man, then, must never forget that “his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work ... is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are”. If man intervenes in nature without abusing it or damaging it, we can say that he “intervenes not in order to modify nature but to foster its development in its own life, that of the creation that God intended. While working in this obviously delicate area, the researcher adheres to the design of God. God willed that man be the king of creation”. In the end, it is God himself who offers to men and women the honour of cooperating with the full force of their intelligence in the work of creation. (460)
III. THE CRISIS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND THE ENVIRONMENT	* <i>The biblical message and the Church's Magisterium represent the essential reference points for evaluating the problems found in the relationship between man and the environment. The tendency towards an “ill-considered” exploitation of the resources of creation is the result of a long historical and cultural process.</i> “The modern era has witnessed man's growing capacity for transformative intervention. The aspect of the conquest and exploitation of resources

has become predominant and invasive, and today it has even reached the point of threatening the environment's hospitable aspect: the environment as 'resource' risks threatening the environment as 'home'. Because of the powerful means of transformation offered by technological civilization, it sometimes seems that the balance between man and the environment has reached a critical point". (461)

* *Nature appears as an instrument in the hands of man, a reality that he must constantly manipulate, especially by means of technology. Such attitudes do not arise from scientific and technological research but from scientism and technocratic ideologies that tend to condition such research.* (462)

* *A correct understanding of the environment prevents the utilitarian reduction of nature to a mere object to be manipulated and exploited. At the same time, it must not absolutize nature and place it above the dignity of the human person himself. **The Magisterium finds the motivation for its opposition to a concept of the environment based on ecocentrism and on biocentrism in the fact that "it is being proposed that the ontological and axiological difference between men and other living beings be eliminated, since the biosphere is considered a biotic unity of undifferentiated value.*** (463)

* *A vision of man and things that is sundered from any reference to the transcendent has led to the rejection of the concept of creation and to the attribution of a completely independent existence to man and nature. The bonds that unite the world to God have thus been broken. This rupture has also resulted in separating man from the world and, more radically, has impoverished man's very identity. Human beings find themselves thinking that they are foreign to the environmental context in which they live. The consequences resulting from this are all too clear: "it is the relationship man has with God that determines his relationship with his fellow men and with his environment. **This is why Christian culture has always recognized the creatures that surround man as also gifts of God to be nurtured and safeguarded with a sense of gratitude to the Creator.*** (464)

* ***The Magisterium underscores human responsibility for the preservation of a sound and healthy environment for all.** "If humanity today succeeds in combining the new scientific capacities with a strong ethical dimension, it will certainly be able to promote the environment as a home and a resource for man and for all men, and will be able to eliminate the causes of pollution and to guarantee adequate conditions of hygiene and health for small groups as well as for vast human settlements.* (465)

IV. A COMMON RESPONSIBILITY a. The environment, a collective good	* <i>Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good,</i> destined for all, by preventing anyone from using “with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate — animals, plants, the natural elements — simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs”. (466) * <i>Responsibility for the environment, the common heritage of mankind, extends not only to present needs but also to those of the future.</i> “We have inherited from past generations, and we have benefited from the work of our contemporaries: for this reason we have obligations towards all, and we cannot refuse to interest ourselves in those who will come after us, to enlarge the human family”. <i>This is a responsibility that present generations have towards those of the future,</i> a responsibility that also concerns individual States and the international community. (467) * <i>Responsibility for the environment should also find adequate expression on a juridical level.</i> The juridical content of “<i>the right to a safe and healthy natural environment</i>” is gradually taking form, stimulated by the concern shown by public opinion to disciplining the use of created goods according to the demands of the common good and a common desire to punish those who pollute. (468) * <i>The authorities called to make decisions concerning health and environmental risks sometimes find themselves facing a situation in which available scientific data are contradictory or quantitatively scarce. It may then be appropriate to base evaluations on the “precautionary principle”, which does not mean applying rules but certain guidelines aimed at managing the situation of uncertainty.</i> (469) * <i>Programs of economic development must carefully consider “the need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature” because natural resources are limited and some are not renewable. The present rhythm of exploitation is seriously compromising the availability of some natural resources for both the present and the future.</i> Solutions to the ecological problem require that economic activity respect the environment to a greater degree, reconciling the needs of economic development with those of environmental protection. Every economic activity making use of natural resources must also be concerned with safeguarding the environment and should foresee the costs involved, which are “an essential element of the actual cost of economic activity”. In this context, one considers relations between human activity and climate change which, given their extreme complexity, must be opportunely and constantly monitored at the scientific, political and juridical, national and international levels. <i>An economy respectful of the environment will not have the maximization of profits as its only objective, because environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits.</i> The environment is one of
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b. The use of biotechnology	those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces. Particular attention will have to be reserved for the complex issues surrounding <i>energy resources</i>. Non-renewable resources, which highly-industrialized and recently-industrialized countries draw from, must be put at the service of all humanity. (470) * The relationship of indigenous peoples to their lands and resources deserves particular attention, since it is a fundamental expression of their identity. Due to powerful agro-industrial interests or the powerful processes of assimilation and urbanization, many of these peoples have already lost or risk losing the lands on which they live, lands tied to the very meaning of their existence. (471) <i>* In recent years pressing questions have been raised with regard to the use of new forms of biotechnology in the areas of agriculture, animal farming, medicine and environmental protection. The new possibilities offered by current biological and biogenetic techniques are a source of hope and enthusiasm on the one hand, and of alarm and hostility on the other.</i> (472) <i>* The Christian vision of creation makes a positive judgment on the acceptability of human intervention in nature, which also includes other living beings, and at the same time makes a strong appeal for responsibility.</i> In effect, nature is not a sacred or divine reality that man must leave alone. Rather, it is a gift offered by the Creator to the human community, entrusted to the intelligence and moral responsibility of men and women. <i>The acceptability of the use of biological and biogenetic techniques is only one part of the ethical problem: as with every human behaviour, it is also necessary to evaluate accurately the real benefits as well as the possible consequences in terms of risks.</i> (473) <i>* Modern biotechnologies have powerful social, economic and political impact locally, nationally and internationally. They need to be evaluated according to the ethical criteria that must always guide human activities and relations in the social, economic and political spheres. Above all the criteria of justice and solidarity must be taken into account. Individuals and groups who engage in research and the commercialization of the field of biotechnology must especially abide by these criteria.</i> (474) <i>* In a spirit of international solidarity, various measures can be taken in relation to the use of new biotechnologies. In the first place, equitable commercial exchange, without the burden of unjust stipulations, is to be facilitated. Promoting the development of the most disadvantaged peoples, however, will not be authentic or effective if it is reduced to the simple exchange of products. It is indispensable to foster the development of a necessary scientific and technological autonomy on the part of these same peoples,</i>
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c. The environment and the sharing of goods	promoting the exchange of scientific and technological knowledge and the transfer of technologies to developing countries. (475) * Solidarity also means appealing to the responsibility of developing countries, and in particular of their political leaders, for promoting trade policies that are favourable to their peoples and the exchange of technology that can improve the conditions of their food supply and health. (476) * Scientists and technicians involved in the field of biotechnology are called to work intelligently and with perseverance in seeking the best solutions to the serious and urgent problems of food supply and health care. (477) * Entrepreneurs and directors of public agencies involved in the research, production and selling of products derived from new biotechnologies must take into account not only legitimate profit but also the common good. By their decisions, entrepreneurs and public agency directors involved in this sector can guide developments in the area of biotechnologies towards very promising ends as far as concerns the fight against hunger, especially in poorer countries, the fight against disease and the fight to safeguard the ecosystem, the common patrimony of all. (478) * Politicians, legislators and public administrators are responsible for evaluating the potentials benefits and possible risks connected with the use of biotechnologies. It is not desirable for their decisions, at the national or international level, to be dictated by pressure from special interest groups. Public authorities must also encourage a correctly informed public opinion and make decisions that are best-suited to the common good. (479) * Leaders in the information sector also have an important task, which must be undertaken with prudence and objectivity. The temptation to fall into superficial information, fuelled by over enthusiasm or unjustified alarmism, must be avoided. (480) * As regards the ecological question, the social doctrine of the Church reminds us that the goods of the earth were created by God to be used wisely by all. They must be shared equitably, in accordance with justice and charity. This is essentially a question of preventing the injustice of hoarding resources: greediness, be it individual or collective, is contrary to the order of creation. Modern ecological problems are of a planetary dimension and can be effectively resolved only through international cooperation capable of guaranteeing greater coordination in the use of the earth's resources. (481) * The environmental crisis and poverty are connected by a complex and dramatic set of causes that can be resolved by the principle of the universal destination of goods, which offers a
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d. New lifestyle	<i>fundamental moral and cultural orientation.</i> The present environmental crisis affects those who are poorest in a particular way, whether they live in those lands subject to erosion and desertification, are involved in armed conflicts or subject to forced immigration, or because they do not have the economic and technological means to protect themselves from other calamities. (482) * <i>The close link that exists between the development of the poorest countries, demographic changes and a sustainable use of the environment must not become a pretext for political and economic choices that are at variance with the dignity of the human person.</i> (483) * <i>The principle of the universal destination of goods also applies naturally to water, considered in the Sacred Scriptures as a symbol of purification (cf. Ps 51:4; Jn 13:8) and of life (cf. Jn 3:5; Gal 3:27). “As a gift from God, water is a vital element essential to survival; thus, everyone has a right to it”. Satisfying the needs of all, especially of those who live in poverty, must guide the use of water and the services connected with it.</i> (484) <i>485. By its very nature water cannot be treated as just another commodity among many, and it must be used rationally and in solidarity with others.</i> The distribution of water is traditionally among the responsibilities that fall to public agencies, since water is considered a public good. If water distribution is entrusted to the private sector it should still be considered a public good. (485) * <i>Serious ecological problems call for an effective change of mentality leading to the adoption of new lifestyles,</i> “in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of the common good are the factors that determine consumer choices, savings and investments”. (486) * <i>The attitude that must characterize the way man acts in relation to creation is essentially one of gratitude and appreciation; the world, in fact, reveals the mystery of God who created and sustains it.</i> If the relationship with God is placed aside, nature is stripped of its profound meaning and impoverished. If on the other hand, nature is rediscovered in its creaturely dimension, channels of communication with it can be established, its rich and symbolic meaning can be understood, allowing us to enter into its realm of <i>mystery</i>. This realm opens the path of man to God, Creator of heaven and earth. <i>The world presents itself before man's eyes as evidence of God</i>, the place where his creative, providential and redemptive power unfolds. (487)
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Charismatic Reflection

لک Humans and Creation

The biblical basis for the right relation between humans and the rest of creation is rooted in the Book of Genesis. The Creation Story of the Hebrew Scriptures affirms unequivocally that **all of creation is good**, as created by God, it is endowed with an inherent dignity and worth. All is formed from the same “**adamah**” or earth. Yet **it is to women and men that the care for the created world is entrusted**. In one sense, it is the disruption in caring of creation, deviating from God’s plan regarding the use of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, that is the occasion of original sin. And as creation itself is affected by the reality of sin, it too will await the fulfilment of the promise of redemption.

**In the days to come the mountain of the Temple of Yahweh
will be lifted higher than the hills. The people will stream to it ...
so that He may teach us his ways ... Nation will not lift sword against nation ...**

Micah 4:1-4

The dynamic of the biblical action of creation is that of establishing **order out of chaos**, the work of ordering, organizing and differentiating the various elements for the good of all of them. Even as God continues this work in time, so too are men and women called, as made in the image of the Creator God, to be co-creators, interacting with the world in a way that brings order to chaos.

The Scriptures also call humanity to exercise dominion over the rest of the created world. It is important, however, to understand the biblical notion of this dominion. While creation’s main purpose is to sustain human life, the human response to it is expressed by a **reverent stewardship**. Included in the weekly Sabbath rest are the animals and the Jubilee year also mandates a period of rest **for the earth for its regeneration**. The created world requires human care and protection even as its gifts support and sustain human life.

This world also is included in God’s plan of salvation:

**The wolf lives with the lamb,
the panther lies down with the kid,
calf and lion cubs feed together with a little boy to lead them ...
the infant plays over the cobra’s hole ...**

Isaiah 11:6-9

It is the whole creation that awaits the fulfilment of peace and justice even as it groans now for that day. According to our Scriptures, the nature and quality of relationships is the foundation of authentic justice and peace of wholeness.

As we consider **our realities of the world around us**, a fundamental question is how our **patterns of relating compare to the biblical understanding of relationships between people, communities, creation and God.**



Environment Cost: Dis-integration of Creation

The **heavens**, the **oceans**, the **land** and even **our very genes** have been **co-opted** by private and government interests for profit and security, removing whole areas from the “global trust”. **Residential and commercial development, mining, oils and gas drilling, timber logging, and commercial agriculture** consume and damage vast tracts of land and ocean areas. The resulting **deforestation** of timber and rain forests, the **desertification** of fertile lands, and the loss of ocean habitats have contributed to the **dislocation of whole peoples**. **Landslides, wild fires, flash floods** and disrupted food production, due in part to habitat destruction, also affect many. **War and violence** often aggravate their situations.



Pollution and Contamination

The growth in human population, increasing rate of material consumption and reliance on disposable goods create an escalating crisis of waste disposal. **Toxic by-products** of industry, commercial agriculture, military operations and nuclear energy threaten earth’s soil and water. Factory and transportation emissions continue to erode the ozone layer and contribute to drastic climate change. Of particular concern is the growing dependence on oil, accounting for 40% of world energy consumption. Besides the political implications of the world’s dependence on oil (most reserves being in geopolitical “hot spots”, the burning of oil is the major source of greenhouse gas leading to global warming.

The contamination of soil, air and water threatens the health of the planet and all creation, leading to millions of preventable diseases and death. Current efforts for recycling, reuse, and reduction of consumer goods are promising, but as of yet there is no global accord on large-scale contamination or common practices and policies of sustainable development.



Food and Water Security

Water scarcity is becoming increasingly widespread. Water tables are falling, wells are contaminated and a rapidly decreasing run-off water flow is available. **Competitive claims on water resources** by large-scale commercial agriculture, industry and urban domestic consumers **deprive the poor and marginalized of adequate water**. The privatisation of the water supply has begun: “Water promises to be to the 21st century what oil was to the 20th century: the precious commodity that determines the wealth of nations.”

Of major concerns is current experimentation with, and commercialization of, genetically modified organisms (GMOs). GMOs are crops whose genes are manipulated for the purpose of higher yields through drought and infestation resistance and increased productivity. However, **the safety of these products for human consumption has not yet proven.** Furthermore, some such crops produce only sterile seeds, creating dependence on the manufactures of GMOs as farmers need to continue to buy. The presence of GMOs also risk the contamination of local and native species, threatening a rich biodiversity of agricultural products.

It is increasingly clear that the planet’s ecosystems cannot sustain the current forms of global development.

What is our Concrete Reflection 

CELEBRATION

- **In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**
- **Amen**

Introduction

Nature is an expression of a plan of love and truth. It goes before us and it is given to us by God as our environment of life. It speaks to us of our Creator and His love for humanity. It is destined to be “recapitulated” in Christ at the end of time. Therefore, even creation is a “vocation.” Caritas in Veritate (n. 48)

HYMN to our God, the CREATOR

Yahweh, what variety you have created, arranging everything so wisely!

Earth is completely full of things You have made:

among them vast expanse of ocean, teeming with countless creatures,

creatures large and small, with the ships going to and fro

and Leviathan whom You made to amuse You.

All creatures depend on You to feed them throughout the year.

You provide the food they eat, with generous hand You satisfy their hunger.

You turn your face away, they suffer, You stop their breath,

they die and revert to dust.

You give breath, fresh life begins, You keep renewing the world.

Glory for ever to Yahweh! May Yahweh find joy in what He creates,

at whose glance the earth trembles, at whose touch the mountains smoke!

I mean to sing to Yahweh all my life, I mean to play for my God as long as I live.

May these reflections of mine give Him pleasure, as much as Yahweh gives me!

May sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked exist no more!

Bless Yahweh, my soul.

AMEN!

Psalm 104:24-35

From the Book of Genesis

Then God said: «See, I give you all the seed-bearing plants that are upon the whole earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this shall be your food. To all wild beasts, all birds of heaven and all living reptiles on the earth I give all the foliage of plants for food». And so it was. God saw all He had made, and indeed it was very good.

Gen. 1: 29

Let us meditate

Peace, justice and care for the earth can only grow together and the threat on one of them is reflected on the others: “The book of nature is one and indivisible, regarding the environment as well as life, sexuality, marriage, family, social relationships, in one word, integral human development.”

Caritas in Veritate, n. 51

As God’s family, let us join hands and together we pray:

OUR FATHER ...

Prayer for the Protection of Creation

God, our Father, Creator of heaven and earth

You have placed all things under our feet:

flocks and herds, all the beasts of the land,

the birds of the air and the fish of the sea,

we entrust ourselves to You, asking You to make us aware

of the gifts of your creation which You placed at our service.

May each one of us feel the dignity and the responsibility

of being with You, King and Guardian of Creation

and never be a tyrant who dominates over the goods You have entrusted to us.

Do not allow anyone to profane,

neither Your Name, nor Your House, nor Your Creatures, nor Your Land.

May it be the place where, through Your charity and companionship,

so that we may anticipate Justice and Joy

which reign in Your Heavenly Kingdom.

Amen!

Personal and Group Reflection

1. **Read with attention and care** the First Chapter of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church or the above passages of the same Document.

2. **Reflect personally and with your Group of the Lay Canossians**, underlining the main interesting points.

3. *"Care for the environment is a challenge for the whole of humanity: that is our common and universal duty to respect the collective good, destined to all, preventing that one may use "without impunity the various categories of creatures, living and inanimate, animals, plants, natural elements - as one desires - according to his/her needs."*

What can we do, in our daily life, in order to be aware of the problems and real needs of society so as to be able to attain this aim?

4. *"Responsibility towards the environment, the common patrimony of the human race, does not extend only to the present needs, but even to those of the future."*

Do I commit myself to respect, to defend and to promote the environment?

5. *"The tendency to "inconsiderate" exploitation of creation's resources is the result of a long, historical and cultural process:*

What can we do to fight this "inconsiderate exploitation"?

6. **Try** to enter your inner self, to discover your deepest aspirations, your social responsibilities.

Meet with Jesus Christ: the Son in Whom you are the son, a brother/sister for others.

7. **Please, send** to the Lay Canossian International Coordinating Team your reflections that help to implement our actions. We will share them

with all our Lay Canossians for greater commitment and solidarity towards a civilization of love.


