

## THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

**48.** Interpreting the story of the rich young man, Pope John Paul II described Jesus as a patient and sensitive teacher who leads the young man step by step to the full truth about the meaning of human life (*The Splendour of Truth (Veritatis Splendor)*, 1993), paragraph 8). The bishops, as successors to the apostles, have the role of confirming moral teaching, clarifying the moral approach to new questions and identifying misunderstandings that may cloud moral judgement. In this work bishops are assisted by the scholarship of theologians and other academics, as well as by the wisdom and experience of lay Christians. The teaching role of the bishops, especially when it is exercised collegially by the bishops acting together in union with the pope, is called the Magisterium.

**49.** The Catholic Church collaborates with others in seeking a deeper consensus about the inviolable dignity of the human person.

**50.** Church teaching guides us to find the truth and to hold on to it with certainty. We recognise that some Catholics have difficulty with certain teachings of the Church. Yet Catholics have a right to receive the fullness of the Church's teaching and they have a corresponding duty to adhere to that teaching (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2037).

**51.** The Church as teacher has the task to proclaim moral truth with clarity, but 'she must be careful not to break the bruised reed or quench the dimly burning wick,' (*The Splendour of Truth*, paragraph 95, quoting *Isaiah* 42:3). The moral life is a response to God that may require difficult choices. However, as St Augustine pointed out, 'God does not command the impossible'; what God requires of us is made possible by the working of grace in our weakness (cf. Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, c.11). The Church, as a community of disciples, is called to walk with those who struggle in the moral life, offering compassion and understanding to those who fail to discern and to live out God's loving will.

**52.** In every society, including our present one, conscientious Christians will sometimes find themselves at odds with the accepted moral standards of the time or even with the law of the land. In our society this may happen, for instance, in regard to the recognition of the right to life of children in the womb. People should not be forced to act against their conscience and the law ought to recognise a right of medical staff to refuse to perform actions that they consider to be morally wrong. Nevertheless, often Christians will suffer as a result of holding fast to moral beliefs and may be denied promotion or advancement in a profession. Here the Christian bears witness to the dignity of human life and to the holiness of God's law.

## QUESTIONS

*The Magisterium of the Church is its teaching authority coming through the Pope and the bishops. Does the group feel that this voice of the Church is often at variance with the voice of Christ coming through the pages of scripture? Discuss*

*With the advent of Pope Francis has the Church shown a more compassionate face relatively recently? Discuss*

*Pope Saint John Paul II, in one of his encyclicals spoke at length about the 'culture of Life versus the 'culture of death' in our modern world. Does the group think that we, as a caring Church' have allowed a sort of misplaced compassion to take over from authoritatively emphasising objective more truths? Discuss*

*Do Catholics as a whole tend to over-privatise their religion or 'hide the light of their faith under tub' instead of going more public with it? Discuss*