

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 10

The rights and duties of the Church

By Leela Ramdeen 07.08.2005

Today we shall focus on Part 1, Chapter 2, I (d) of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* entitled: "The rights and duties of the Church". With her social doctrine, the Church aims "at helping man on the path of salvation" (John Paul II's Encyclical Letter, *Centesimus Annus*).

The Compendium tells us that this is the Church's primary and sole purpose: "There is no intention to usurp or invade the duties of others or to neglect her own; nor is there any thought of pursuing objectives that are foreign to her mission. This mission serves to give an overall shape to the Church's right and at the same time her duty to develop a social doctrine of her own and to influence society and societal structures with it by means of the responsibility and tasks to which it gives rise."

We read, both in *Dignitatis Humanae* and in *Veritatis Splendor*, that the Church "has the right to be a teacher for mankind, a teacher of the truth of faith: the truth not only of dogmas but also of the morals whose source lies in human nature itself and in the Gospel."

How often do you read extracts from the Bible? Please read Mt 7:24; Lk 6:46-47; Jn 14:21,23-24; Jas 1:22. These extracts clearly bear testimony to the Compendium's statement that "the Gospel is not only to be heard but is also to be observed and put into practice.

"Consistency in behaviour shows what one truly believes and is not limited only to things strictly Church-related or spiritual but involves men and women in the entirety of their life experience and in the context of all their responsibilities. However worldly these responsibilities may be, their subject remains man, that is, the human being whom God calls, by means of the Church, to participate in the gift of salvation."

But how should we respond to the gift of salvation? We are told that we should respond to this gift "not with a partial, abstract or merely verbal acceptance, but with the whole of our lives – in very relationship that defines life – so as not to neglect anything, leaving it in a profane and worldly realm where it is irrelevant or foreign to salvation.

"For this reason the Church's social doctrine is not a privilege for her, nor a digression, a convenience or interference: it is her right to proclaim the Gospel in the context of society, to make the liberating word of the Gospel resound in the complex worlds of production, labour, business, finance, trade, politics, law, culture, social communications, where men and women live."

'Rights' are normally accompanied by 'Duties/Responsibilities'. Therefore, we read that this right of the Church is at the same time a duty, "because she cannot forsake this

responsibility without denying herself and her fidelity to Christ: ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!’ (1 Cor 9:16)

The warning that St. Paul addresses to himself rings in the Church’s conscience as a call to walk all paths of evangelization, not only those that lead to individual consciences but also those that wind their way into public institutions: on the one hand, religion must not be restricted to the purely private sphere. On the other, as stated in *Centesimus Annus*, the Christian message must not be relegated to a purely other-worldly salvation incapable of shedding light on our earthly existence.”

Paul VI made it clear in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, that because of the public relevance of the Gospel and faith, because of the corrupting effects of injustice, that is, of sin, the Church cannot remain indifferent to social matters.”

The Code of Canon Law (canon 747) states: “To the Church belongs the right always and everywhere to announce moral principles, including those pertaining to the social order, and to make judgments on any human affairs to the extent that they are required by the fundamental rights of the human person or for the salvation of souls.” As a Eucharistic people, we cannot afford to remain indifferent to the injustices that confront us in our society and in our world.

The Eucharist challenges us to bring about a new world order based on the pillars of peace as outlined in Pope John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris*: truth, love, justice, and freedom. The Compendium awakens our social consciences and empowers us to become true witnesses to our faith. Let us reflect on the words of CCSJ’s prayer:

O God, open our hearts to the gift of your Holy Spirit as we seek to promote your reign here in Trinidad and Tobago. Help us, Lord, to become a nation where peace is built with justice and justice is guided by love, love of God and love of neighbour. Help us to discover and live our faith so that our concern for social justice will be transformed into constructive action as we spread the Good News in this land. We ask you, O God, to guide and bless all our efforts. Inspire us as you did the Prophets of old with courage, imagination and creativity. This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.