

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 12

The Church's ministry of teaching

By Leela Ramdeen 21.08.2005

We focus today on Part One, Chapter 2, II c and d of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

- c) An expression of the Church's ministry of teaching; and
- d) For a society reconciled in justice and love.

The Church formulates its social doctrine, disseminates it and teaches it. The *Compendium* makes it clear that the social doctrine is not a "prerogative of a certain component of the ecclesial body but of the entire community; it is the expression of the way that the Church understands society and of her position regarding social structures and changes. The whole of the Church community – priests, religious and laity – participates in the formulation of this social doctrine, each according to the different tasks charisms and ministries found within her."

Lumen Gentium states that these varied contributions which are themselves expressions of the "supernatural appreciation of the faith...of the whole people" are taken up, interpreted and formed into "a unified whole by the Magisterium, which promulgates the social teaching as Church Doctrine. To the Church's Magisterium belongs those who have received ...the ministry of teaching in the areas of faith and morals with the authority received from Christ.

"The Church's social doctrine is not only the thought or work of qualified persons, but is the thought of the Church, insofar as it is the work of the Magisterium, which teaches with the authority that Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors: the Pope and the Bishops in communion with him (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2034).

"...Of primary importance is the universal Magisterium of the Pope and the Council: this is the Magisterium that determines the direction and gives marks of the development of this social doctrine. This doctrine in turn is integrated into the Magisterium of the Bishops who, in the concrete and particular situations of the many different local circumstances, give precise definition to this teaching, translating it and putting it into practice." (*Octogesima Adveniens*).

The social teaching of the bishops offers "valid contributions and impetus to the Magisterium of the Roman Pontiff. In this way, there is a circulating at work that in fact expresses the collegiality of the Church's Pastors united to the Pope in the Church's social teaching.

The doctrinal body that emerges includes and integrates in this fashion the universal teaching of the Popes and the particular teaching of the Bishops. Insofar as it is part of Church's moral teaching, the Church's social doctrine has the same dignity and authority

as her moral teaching. It is 'authentic Magisterium, which obligates the faithful to adhere to it.'" (*Catechism*, 2037).

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stated in *Donum Veritatis* that the "doctrinal weight of the different teachings and the assent required are determined by the nature of the particular teachings, by their level of independence from contingent and variable elements, and by the frequency with which they are invoked."

Centesimus Annus states that the object of the Church's social doctrine is "essentially the same that constitutes the reason for its existence: the human person called to salvation, and as such entrusted by Christ to the Church's care and responsibility. By means of her social doctrine, the Church shows her concern for human life in society, aware that the quality of social life- that is, of the relationships of justice and love that form the fabric of society – depends in a decisive manner on the protection and promotion of the human person, for whom every community comes into existence.

"In fact, at play in society are the dignity and rights of the person, and peace in the relationships between persons and between communities of persons...the Church's social doctrine has the task of proclamation, and also of denunciation. In the first place it is the proclamation of what the Church possesses proper to herself: "a view of man and of human affairs in their totality" (*Populorum Progressio*).

As is stated in *Octogesima Adveniens*, the Church's social doctrine offers not only meaning, value and criteria of judgment, but also the norms and directives of action that arise from these. *The Compendium* reminds us that with her social doctrine, "the Church does not attempt to structure or organise society, but to appeal to, guide and form consciences."

Gaudium et Spes makes it clear that "this social doctrine also entails a duty to denounce, when sin is present: the sin of injustice and violence that in different ways moves through society and is embodied in it. By denunciation, the Church's social doctrine becomes judge and defender of unrecognised and violated rights, especially those of the poor, the least and the weak.

"The more these rights are ignored or trampled, the greater becomes the extent of violence and injustice, involving entire categories of people and large geographical areas of the world, thus giving rise to social questions, that is, to abuses and imbalances that lead to social upheaval. A large part of the Church's social teaching is solicited and determined by important social questions, to which social justice is the proper answer.

A number of encyclicals dating from *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) emphasise that the intent of the Church's social doctrine is of the religious and moral order. Religious because the Church's evangelising and salvific mission embraces man "in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and also of his community and social being" (*Redemptor Hominis*).

Moral because the Church aims at a “complete form of humanism” (*Populorum Progressio*), that is to say, at the “liberation from everything that oppresses man” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*) and “the development of the whole man and of all men” (*Populorum Progressio*).

The Church’s social doctrine, states the *Compendium*, indicates “the path to follow for a society reconciled and in harmony through justice and love, a society that anticipates in history, in a preparatory and pre-figurative manner, the “*new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*” (2 Pet 3:13).