

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 13

A message for humanity

By Leela Ramdeen 28.08.2005

Let us reflect on Part 1, Chapter 2, II e & f of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* entitled:

- e) A message for the sons and daughters of the Church and for humanity; and
- f) Under the sign of continuity and renewal.

The *Compendium* makes it clear that 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 recognise 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."

Our *Catechism* (2039) tells us that "in the tasks of evangelisation, 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."

In #2442, our *Catechism* continues by stating that the Church's 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."

Both *Christifideles Laici* and *Lumen Gentium* emphasise that "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." And in *Gaudium et Spes* and *Populorum Progressio* we read: "by fulfilling these responsibilities, the lay faithful put the Church's social teaching into action and thus fulfil the Church's secular mission."

The *Compendium* reminds us, however, that besides being "destined primarily and specifically to the sons and daughters of the Church, her social doctrine also has a universal destination. The light of the Gospel that the Church's social doctrine shines on society illuminates all men and women, and every conscience and mind is in a position to grasp the human depths of meaning and values expressed in it and the potential of humanity and humanization contained in its norms of action."

Mater et Magistra stresses that "it is to all people...to everyone in the name of the one God, Creator and ultimate end of man, that the Church's social doctrine is addressed." *Pacem in Terris* reinforces this by stating that "this social doctrine is a teaching explicitly addressed to all people of good will."

The *Compendium* tells us that the social doctrine is, in fact, "heard by members of other

Churches and Ecclesial Communities, by followers of other religious traditions and by people who belong to no religious group.”

According to *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, “guided by the perennial light of the Gospel and ever attentive to evolution of society, the Church’s social doctrine is characterised by continuity and renewal.”

It shows above all, states the *Compendium*, “the continuity of a teaching that refers to the universal values drawn from Revelation and human nature. For this reason, the Church’s social doctrine does not depend on the different cultures, ideologies or opinions: it is a constant teaching that “remains identical in its fundamental inspiration, in its ‘principles of reflection’, in its ‘criteria of judgment’, in its basic ‘directives for action’, and above all in its vital link with the Gospel of the Lord.” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*)”

While the Church’s social doctrine is not conditioned by history and does not run the risk of fading away, the *Compendium* states that in its constant turning to history and in engaging the events taking place, the Church’s social doctrine shows a capacity for continuous renewal.

Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia* states that “Standing firm in its principles does not make it a rigid teaching system, but a Magisterium capable of opening itself to new things, without having its nature altered by them.”

It is a teaching that is “subject to the necessary and opportune adaptations suggested by the changes in historical conditions and by the unceasing flow of the events which are the setting of the life of people and society.” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*)

The Church’s social doctrine, says the *Compendium*, “is presented as a “work site” where the work is always in progress, where perennial truth penetrates and permeates new circumstances, indicating paths of justice and peace.”

Centesimus Annus tells us that, “Faith does not presume to confine changeable social and political realities within a closed framework.” Rather, says the *Compendium*, the contrary is true: “faith is the leaven of innovation and creativity. The teaching that constantly takes this as its starting point “develops through reflection applied to the changing situations of this world, under the driving force of the Gospel as the source of renewal” (Octogesima Adveniens).

Mother and Teacher, says the *Compendium*, the Church “does not close herself off nor retreat within herself but is always open, reaching out to and turned towards man, whose destiny of salvation is her reason for being. She is in the midst of men and women as the living icon of the Good Shepherd, who goes in search of and finds man where he is, in the existential and historical circumstances of his life. It is there that the Church becomes for man a point of contact with the Gospel, with the message of liberation and reconciliation, of justice and peace.”