

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 16

Reflections on a new social order

By Leela Ramdeen 18.09.05

Today we continue to focus on Part 1, Chapter 2 III: The Church's Social Doctrine in Our Time Historical Notes b) From *Rerum Novarum* to our own day.

The *Compendium* tells us that Pope Pius XII's pontificate "covered the terrible years of the Second World War and the difficult years of reconstruction. He published no social encyclicals but in many different contexts he constantly showed his concern for the international order, which had been badly shaken."

In his Christmas radio messages, and "with other important interventions in social matters, magisterial reflection on a new social order guided by morality and law, and focusing on justice and peace," he spoke on:

- the order within nations
- democracy
- the function of Christian civilisation
- making a return to God in generosity and brotherhood
- the year of the great return and of great forgiveness
- the depersonalisation of man
- the role of progress in technology and peace among peoples.

The Congregation for Catholic Education's, "Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests" states:

"During the war and the post-war period, for many people of all continents and for millions of believers and non-believers, the social teaching of Pope Pius XII represented the voice of universal conscience... With his moral authority and prestige, Pope Pius XII brought the light of Christian wisdom to countless men of every category and social level."

The *Compendium* states that one of the characteristics of Pope Pius XII's interventions is "the importance he gave to the relationship between morality and law. He insisted on the notion of natural law as the soul of the system to be established on both the national and international levels. Another important aspect of Pope Pius XII's teaching was his attention to the professional and business classes, called to work together in a special way for the attainment of the common good."

The guidelines referred to above state: "Due to his sensitivity and intelligence in grasping the 'signs of the times', Pope Pius XII can be considered the immediate precursor of Vatican Council II and of the social teaching of the Popes who followed him."

Blessed Pope John XXIII

The *Compendium* considers next the major works of Blessed Pope John XXIII: “The 1960s bring promising prospects: recovery after the devastation of the war, the beginning of decolonization, and the first timid signs of a thaw in the relations between the American and Soviet blocks. This is the context in which Blessed Pope John XXIII read deeply into the ‘signs of the times’ (*Pacem in Terris*).

“The social question is becoming universal and involves all countries: together with the labour question and the Industrial Revolution, there come to the fore problems of agriculture, of developing regions, of increasing populations, and those concerning the need for global economic cooperation. Inequalities that in the past were experienced within nations are now becoming international and make the dramatic situation of the Third World ever more evident.

“Blessed Pope John XXIII, in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961) aims at updating the already known documents, and at taking a further step forward in the process of involving the whole Christian community.

The key words in the encyclical are *community* and *socialization*: the Church is called in truth, justice and love to cooperate in building with all men and women an authentic *communion*. In this way economic growth will not be limited to satisfying men’s needs, but it will also promote their dignity.

“With the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963), Blessed Pope John XXIII brings to the forefront the problem of peace in an era marked by nuclear proliferation. Moreover, *Pacem in Terris* contains one of the first in-depth reflections on rights on the part of the Church; it is the encyclical of peace and human dignity. It continues and completes the discussion presented in *Mater et Magistra*, and, in continuing in the direction indicated by Pope Leo XIII, it emphasises the importance of the cooperation of all men and women.

“It is the first time that a Church document is addressed also to ‘all men of good will’, who are called to a great task: ‘to establish with truth, justice, love and freedom new methods of relationships in human society.’

Pacem in Terris dwells on the public authority of the world community, called to ‘tackle and solve problems of an economic, social, political or cultural character which are posed by the universal common good.’

“On the tenth anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*, Cardinal Maurice Roy, the President of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and peace, sent Pope Paul VI a letter accompanying a document with a series of reflections on the different possibilities afforded by the teaching contained in Pope John XXIII’s encyclical for shedding light on the new problems connected with promotion of peace.”

Next week we move on to consider two important documents of the Second Vatican Council: The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1966), and *Dignitatis Humanae*. We will also focus on developments during Pope Paul VI's pontificate.

At the invitation of Fr Harcourt Blackett, I ran a weekend workshop for catechists recently in Barbados. We lamented the fact that too often after Confirmation Catholics think that they "know it all" and fail to develop their knowledge about their faith. Catechesis/faith formation/learning about our faith is a lifelong process.

I know that my own life is constantly being enriched as I learn more and more about my faith. What about you?