

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 17

Solidarity with the human race

By Leela Ramdeen 25.09.05

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 the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1966) of the Second Vatican Council is “a significant response of the Church to the expectations of the contemporary world.”

In this Constitution, “in harmony with the ecclesiological renewal, a new concept of how to be a community of believers and people of God are reflected. It aroused a new interest regarding the doctrine contained in the preceding documents on the witness and life of Christians, as authentic ways of making the presence of God in the world visible”. (Congregation for Catholic Education).

Gaudium et Spes, states the *Compendium*, “presents the face of a Church that ‘cherishes a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history’, that travels the same journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world, but which at the same time; is to be a leaven and as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God.’

“*Gaudium et Spes* presents in a systematic manner the themes of culture, of economic and social life, of marriage and the family, of the political community, of peace and the community of peoples, in the light of a Christian anthropological outlook and of the Church's mission. Everything is considered from the starting point of the person and with a view to the person, ‘the only creature that God willed for its own sake’.

“Society, its structures and development must be oriented towards ‘the progress of the human person.’ For the first time, the Magisterium of the Church, at its highest level, speaks at great length about the different temporal aspects of Christian life: ‘It must be recognised that the attention given by the Constitution to social, psychological, political, economic, moral and religious changes has increasingly stimulated...the Church's pastoral concern for men's problems and dialogue with the world’”. (Congregation for Catholic Education).

Dignitatis Humanae

Another very important document of the Second Vatican Council in the corpus of the Church's social doctrine is the Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* (1966) in which the right to religious freedom is clearly proclaimed. The *Compendium* states that the document presents the theme in two chapters.

“The first, of a general character, affirms that religious freedom is based on the dignity of

the human person and that it must be sanctioned as a civil right in the legal order of society. The second chapter deals with the theme in the light of Revelation and clarifies its pastoral implications, pointing out that it is a right that concerns not only people as individuals but also the different communities of people.”

In 1967, Pope Paul VI solemnly proclaims in his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*: “Development is the new name for peace”. This encyclical “may be considered a development of the chapter on economic and social life in *Gaudium et Spes*, even while it introduces some significant new elements.

In particular, it presents the outlines of an integral development of man and of a development in solidarity with all humanity: ‘These two topics are to be considered the axes around which the encyclical is structured. In wishing to convince its receivers of the urgent need for action in solidarity, the pope presents development as ‘the transition from less humane conditions to those which are more humane’ and indicates its characteristics.” (Congregation for Catholic Education).

This transition, states the *Compendium*, “is not limited to merely economic or technological dimensions, but implies for each person the acquisition of culture, the respect for the dignity of others, the acknowledgement of ‘the highest good, the recognition of God Himself, the author and end of these blessings’.

Development that benefits everyone responds to the demands of justice on a global scale that guarantees worldwide peace and makes it possible to achieve a ‘complete humanism’ guided by spiritual values.

“In this regard, in 1967, Pope Paul VI establishes the Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax*, thus fulfilling the wishes of the Council Fathers who considered it ‘most opportune that an organism of the Universal Church be set up in order that both the justice and love of Christ toward the poor might be developed everywhere. The role of such an organism would be to stimulate the Catholic community to promote progress in needy regions and international social justice’ (*Gaudium et Spes*).

“By initiative of Pope Paul VI, beginning in 1968, the Church celebrates the first day of the year as the World Day of Peace. This same Pontiff started the tradition of writing annual messages that deal with the theme chosen for each World Day of Peace. These messages expand and enrich the corpus of the Church’s social doctrine.

“At the beginning of the 1970s, in a climate of turbulence and strong ideological controversy, Pope Paul VI returns to the social teaching of Pope Leo XIII and updates it, on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, with his apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971).

The Pope reflects on post-industrial society with all of its complex problems, noting the inadequacy of ideologies in responding to their challenges: urbanisation, the condition of young people, the condition of women, unemployment, discrimination, emigration,

population growth, the influence of the means of social communications, the ecological problem.”

Today we are still confronted by these and other challenges. In his World Peace message on January 1, 2005, the late Pope John Paul II made it clear that: "Every person in the world has a role to play in fostering peace and justice." It is time to move from our pews and play our role in this process.