

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 22

Social sin and hope of eternal life

By Leela Ramdeen 30.10.05

Today we come to the end of Part One of the *Compendium*, Chapter 3 entitled: The Human Person and Human Rights – Section II (b) The tragedy of sin. As was stated in last week's article, the *Compendium* tells us that every sin is personal under a certain aspect; under another, every sin is social, insofar as and because it also has social consequences. Today we move on to consider "social sin".

Certain sins, state the *Compendium*, "constitute by their very object a direct assault on one's neighbour. Such sins in particular are known as social sins. Social sin is every sin committed against the justice due in relations between individuals, between the individual and the community, and also between the community and the individual.

"Social too, is every sin against the rights of the human person, starting with the right to life, including that of life in the womb, and every sin against the physical integrity of the individual; every sin against the freedom of others, especially against the supreme freedom to believe in God and worship him; and every sin against the dignity and honour of one's neighbour.

"Every sin against the common good and its demands, in the whole broad area of rights and duties of citizens, is also social sin. In the end, social sin is that sin that 'refers to the relationships between the various human communities.

These relationships are not always in accordance with the plan of God, who intends that there be justice in the world and freedom and peace between individuals, groups and peoples' (*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*).

"The consequences of sin perpetuate the structures of sin. These are rooted in personal sin and, therefore, are always connected to concrete acts of the individuals who commit them, consolidate them and make it difficult to remove them.

It is thus that they grow stronger, spread and become sources of other sins, conditioning human conduct (*Catechism*, 1869). These are obstacles and conditioning that go well beyond the actions and brief life span of the individual and interfere also in the process of the development of peoples, the delay and slow pace of which must be judged in this light (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*).

"The actions and attitudes opposed to the will of God and the good of neighbour, as well as the structures arising from such behaviour, appear to fall into two categories today: 'on the one hand, the all-consuming desire for profit, and on the other, the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one's will upon others. In order to characterise better each of these attitudes, one can add the expression: 'at any price'" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*).

“The doctrine of original sin, which teaches the universality of sin, has an important foundation: *‘If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us’* (1 Jn 1:8). This doctrine encourages men and women not to remain in guilt and not to take guilt lightly, continuously seeking scapegoats in other people and justification in the environment, in heredity, in institutions, in structures and in relationships. This is a teaching that unmasks such deceptions.

Christian realism sees the abysses of sin, but in the light of the hope, greater than any evil, given by Jesus Christ’s act of redemption, in which sin and death are destroyed (Rom 5:18 – 21; 1 Cor 15:56-57): *‘In him God reconciled man to himself’* (*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*). It is Christ, the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15), who enlightens fully and brings to completion the image and likeness of God in man.

“The Word that became man in Jesus Christ has always been mankind’s life and light, the light that enlightens every person (Jn 1:4, 9). God desires in the one mediator Jesus Christ, his Son, the salvation of all men and women (1 Tim 2:4-5).

Jesus is at the same time the Son of God and the new Adam, that is, the new man (1 Cor 15:47 – 49; Rom 5:14): *‘Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling’* (*Gaudium et Spes*). In him we are, by God, *‘pre-destined to be conformed to the image of his son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren’* (Rom 8:29).

“The new reality that Jesus Christ gives us is not grafted onto human nature nor is it added from outside: it is rather that reality of communion with the Trinitarian God to which men and women have always been oriented in the depths of their being, thanks to their creaturely likeness to God. But this is also a reality that people cannot attain by their own forces alone.

“Through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, in whom this reality of communion has already been brought about in a singular manner, men and women are received as children of God (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 4:4-7). By means of Christ, we share in the nature of God, who gives us infinitely more *‘than all that we ask or think’* (Eph 3:20).

“What mankind has already received is nothing more than a token or a ‘guarantee’ (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14) of what it will receive in its fullness only in the presence of God, seen ‘face to face’ (1 Cor 13:12), that is, a guarantee of eternal life: *‘And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent’* (Jn 17:3).

“The universality of this hope also includes, besides the men and women of all peoples, heaven and earth: *‘Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth, and let it cause righteousness to spring up also; I the Lord have created it’* (Is 45:8).

“According to the New Testament, all creation, together indeed with all humanity, awaits

the Redeemer: subjected to futility, creation reaches out full of hope, with groans and birth pangs, longing to be freed from decay (Rom 8:18-22).”