

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 2

God's plan of love for humanity

By Leela Ramdeen 12.06.2005

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* comprises three parts, 12 chapters, 331 pages of text and footnotes and 193 pages of Index of References and Analytical References.

Part one of the Compendium, entitled God's Plan of Love for Humanity, comprises four sections:

- a) God's liberating action in the history of Israel
- b) Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of the Father's Plan of Love
- c) The Human Person in God's Plan of Love
- d) God's Plan and the Mission of the Church

In my article last week, I focused mainly on the Introduction of the *Compendium*. This week, I focus on 'a' above. I wish to state that my references over the next few months to extracts from the various sections can never really capture the richness and depth of the *Compendium*, which I consider to be a "must read" book. When it is re-printed, I urge all Catholics to get a copy and read it with your families and friends.

Part One rightly begins with a pertinent quotation from John Paul II's encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, 55 (On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*): "The theological dimension is needed both for interpreting and for solving present day problems in human society."

We are reminded in the section on God's liberating action in the history of Israel (pages 13–17) that "every authentic religious experience, in all cultural traditions, leads to an intuition of the Mystery that, not infrequently, is able to recognise some aspect of God's face."

In every religious experience, importance attaches to the dimension of God's "gift and gratuitousness". Everything that exists takes its origin from God – His gift to us. He guarantees to each human being the basic conditions of life, and places at our disposal the goods that are necessary for us to live.

While God is seen as the "origin of what exists", he also appears as the "measure of what should be, as the presence that challenges human action – both at the personal and at the social levels – regarding the use of those very goods in relation to other people".

Our human conscience senses that it is "called to manage responsibly and together with others the gifts received". Proof of this is found in the golden rule: "*So always treat others as you would like them to treat you...*" (Mt 7:12)

A clear example of God's love for us is His revelation of Himself to the people of Israel.

The “gratuitous presence of God” is manifested in the gift of freedom of the Israelites from slavery and the Promised Land, and the gift of the Covenant on Sinai and the Ten Commandments. Our *Catechism* states that the Commandments “teach us the true humanity of man.

They bring to light the essential duties, and therefore, indirectly, the fundamental rights inherent in the nature of the human person” (2070). They describe universal human morality and, as John Paul II stated in *Veritatis Splendor*, 97, they “constitute the indispensable rules of all social life”.

We are reminded that the Prophets proclaim that God’s Spirit, poured into the human heart, will make the sentiments of justice and solidarity, which reside in the Lord’s heart, take root in us (Jer 31:33 and Ezek (36:26-27).

Then God’s will, articulated in the ten Commandments, “will be able to take root creatively in man’s innermost being. This process of internalisation gives rise to greater depth and realism in social action, making possible the progressive universalisation of attitudes of justice and solidarity, which the people of the Covenant are called to have towards all men and women of every people and nation”.

In God’s plan, He “freely confers being and life on everything that exists”. And because he created human beings in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27), we are “called to be the visible sign and the effective instrument of divine gratuitousness in the garden where God has placed (us) as cultivators and custodians of the goods of creation”.

We are reminded that original sin committed by Adam and Eve has led to “permanent temptation and the disordered situation in which humanity comes to find itself”. As is stated in *Gaudium et Spes*, disobedience to God means “hiding from his loving countenance and seeking to control one’s life and action in the world.

Breaking the relation of communion with God causes a rupture in the internal unity of the human person, in the relations of communion between man and woman and of the harmonious relations between mankind and other creatures”.

The section ends with a reminder that it is in the original estrangement of Adam and Eve from God that are to be found “the deepest roots of all the evils that afflict social relations between people, of all the situations in economic and political life that attack the dignity of the person, that assail justice and solidarity”.

Our task is to work earnestly to heal that rupture with God so that His plan for us can be realised. If we are in communion with God, our relations with each other and with the rest of God’s creation will be harmonious.