

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 6

The Mission of the Church

By Leela Ramdeen 10.07.2005

This article focuses on Part 1, Chapter 1 (iv) of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church entitled: God's plan and the mission of the Church: - (a) The Church, sign and defender of the transcendence of the human person.

We read that the Church, which really is the community of those who have been brought together by the Risen Christ and who have set out to follow Him, is "the sign and the safeguard of the transcendent dimension of the human person". (Gaudium et Spes)

The Church is "in Christ a kind of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men". (Lumen Gentium)

But what is the mission of the Church? Her mission is that of "proclaiming and communicating the salvation wrought in Jesus Christ which He calls: 'the kingdom of God' (Mk 1:15), that is, communion with God and among men. The goal of salvation, the Kingdom of God embraces all people and is fully realised beyond history, in God."

Lumen Gentium tells us that the Church has received "the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that Kingdom".

The Church serves the Kingdom of God "by announcing and communicating the Gospel of salvation and by establishing new Christian communities". Moreover, she "serves the Kingdom by spreading throughout the world the 'Gospel values' which are an expression of the Kingdom and which help people to accept God's plan".

It is important for us to realise that a 'temporal dimension' or 'inchoate reality' of God's Kingdom can be found "beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live 'Gospel values' and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where He wills (Jn 3:8). But it must be...added that this temporal dimension of the Kingdom remains incomplete unless it is related to the Kingdom of Christ present in the Church and straining towards eschatological fullness" (Redemptoris Missio) – which can only be attained in the next life.

Following from this, our Catechism (2245) reminds us that the Church is not to be confused with the political community and is not bound to any political system. In fact, we read in the Compendium that the political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields, and both are, even if under different titles, "devoted to the service of the personal and social vocation of the same human beings". (Gaudium et Spes)

In order to make humankind and its history more human, the Church “places herself as a bulwark against every totalitarian temptation, as she shows man his integral and definitive vocation” (Catechism, 2244).

By her preaching of the Gospel, the grace of the sacraments and the experience of fraternal communion, the Church “heals and elevates the dignity of the human person, . . . consolidates society and endows the daily activity of men with a deeper sense and meaning.” (Gaudium et Spes).

Therefore, the coming of the Kingdom of God can be seen “in the development of a human social sense which, for mankind, is a leaven for attaining wholeness, justice and solidarity in openness to the Transcendence as a point of reference for one’s own personal definitive fulfillment”. (Compendium, 28)

We need to ask ourselves, particularly during this Year of the Eucharist: Are we truly developing ‘a human social sense’? For example: How do we demonstrate that we see God in our neighbour’s face? Are we standing in solidarity with the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised?

Are we striving to break down the barriers that divide us and prevent us from developing fraternal communities? Are we accepting our responsibility for being stewards of all God’s creation? On a scale of 1 to 10, as a Eucharistic people, how are we doing with making God’s Kingdom of justice, peace, love, freedom, and truth a reality in our country/world?

As His Grace stated in his “Decree of Approval” of the Resolutions of Synod 2005: “While . . . we can rely, in part, on the growth the Archdiocese has experienced since the Synod sessions of 2003, the Resolutions of Synod 2005 will call for a new level of listening, sharing and commitment to Church.” Commitment to Church requires prayer AND action.

To assist parishes in the task of developing our ‘human social sense’, CCSJ will be sending shortly to each parish a copy of a videotape of our recent seminar on The Eucharist and Social Justice.

The excellent presentations on the theme by His Grace, Archbishop Edward J. Gilbert C.Ss.R, Fr Henry Charles, Fr Jason Gordon and Fr Malcolm Rodrigues SJ are worth reflecting on and should inspire us to BE the Body of Christ in our world; to be true witnesses of our faith in our daily lives.