

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 9

Evangelisation and social doctrine

By Leela Ramdeen 31.07.2005

Let us reflect on Part 1, Chapter 2, I (c) of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* entitled: "Social doctrine, evangelisation and human promotion."

Too often we seek to evangelise without understanding what this ministry entails.

The Compendium reminds us that the Church's social doctrine is an integral part of her evangelising ministry:

"Nothing that concerns the community of men and women – situations and problems regarding justice, freedom, development, relations between peoples, peace – is foreign to evangelisation, and evangelisation would be incomplete if it did not take into account the mutual demands continually made by the Gospel and by the concrete, personal and social life of man." (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*)

This encyclical, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, also highlights the fact that profound links exist between evangelisation and human promotion: "These include links of an anthropological order, because the man who is to be evangelised is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions. They also include links in the theological order, since one cannot disassociate the plan of creation from the plan of Redemption.

"The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combated and of justice to be restored. They include links of the eminently evangelical order, which is that of charity: how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and in peace the true, authentic advancement of man?"

Centesimus Annus confirms that the Church's social doctrine "is itself a valid instrument of evangelisation" which, as the Compendium states, "is born of the always new meeting of the Gospel message and social life".

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis states that the social doctrine is a distinctive way for the Church to carry out her ministry of the Word and her prophetic role.

"...to teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelising mission and is an essential part of the Christian message, since this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society and situates daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ the Saviour." (*Centesimus Annus*)

The Compendium stresses that this is not a marginal interest or activity, or one that is tacked on to the Church's mission, rather it is at the very heart of the Church's ministry of service: with her social doctrine the Church "proclaims God and his mystery of salvation in Christ to every human being, and for that very reason reveals man to

himself” (*Centesimus Annus*). This, states the Compendium, is “a ministry that stems not only from proclamation but also from witness”.

Our Catechism tells us that the Church “does not assume responsibility for every aspect of life in society, but speaks with the competence that is hers, which is that of proclaiming Christ the Redeemer” (2420). *Gaudium et Spes* makes it clear that: “Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic or social order; the purpose he assigned to her was a religious one. But this religious mission can be the source of commitment, direction and vigour to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God.”

This means, as *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* states, that “the Church does not intervene in technical questions with her social doctrine, nor does she propose or establish systems or models of social organisation”. This is not part of the mission entrusted to her by Christ. The Compendium reminds us that “the Church’s competence comes from the Gospel: from the message that sets man free, the message proclaimed and borne witness to by the Son of God made man.”

In my next article, I will share with you what the Compendium teaches us about “the rights and duties of the Church” in relation to her social doctrine. Once more, I urge you to study these sections of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* as presented each week in the *Catholic News*. These will be of assistance to us as we continue to mark The Year of the Eucharist.

These articles will also help us to develop a deeper awareness of the social dimensions of the Eucharist and of the way in which we should live our lives as a Eucharistic people. We can only be true witnesses to our faith if we know the teachings of our faith and commit ourselves to live by these teachings.