



Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

A compendium of social wisdom

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Last October of 2016, 12 years of the publication, on October 25, 2004, of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, was fulfilled. For the first time in the history of the Church, the compendium brings together the teachings of the magisterium on social issues.

The introduction of the volume explains that the text tries to be "an instrument for the moral and pastoral discernment of the complex events that mark our time" (No. 10). It tries to be an aid that inspires the attitudes and choices of individuals and organizations in a way that allows them to "look to the future with greater confidence and hope".

The text begins by explaining the foundation of the Church's interest in social issues. At the beginning of the third millennium, the Church continues to preach the name of Christ as a way of salvation.

Such salvation is not only achieved in the new life after death, "but also affects this world in the realities of economics and work, technology and communications, society, and politics, of the international community and the relations between cultures and peoples», says the compendium in the No. 1.

The salvation offered by Christ is for the person in all their dimensions, personal, social, spiritual and corporeal. This salvation is also universal. In this way, a bond is given "between the relationship that the person is called to have with God and the responsibility that he has towards his neighbor in the concrete circumstances of history" (No. 40).

Fundamental guidelines

The introductory section of the compendium deals with some of the fundamental issues that are at the base of catholic social teaching. To begin the text it points out that efforts in social issues are not only motivated by philanthropic concern or political interests. "In discovering that God loves them, human beings come to understand their transcendent dignity, they learn not to be satisfied with themselves but to find their neighbor in a network of relationships that are more than ever authentically human" (No. 4).

The Christian love that should transform human relationships stimulates people to be interested in the problems that surround them, explains the text. This love has its source in the Trinity, and it was love that inspired the Ministry of Jesus. The commandment of love contained in the Gospels "must inspire, purify and elevate any human relationship in society and Politics" (No. 33).

Another important spiritual foundation of Christian social action is the duty to overcome sin through the transformation of the human person. Personal and social life, observes the number 41, is threatened by sin, but Christ gave us an example that we can follow. Transforming ourselves by following the model given to humanity by Christ "is the requirement" to transform our relationships with others (No. 41).

Finding the right balance between spiritual and temporal realities is another topic discussed in the first part of the compendium. The text, in number 45, cites the constitution of Vatican II «Gaudium et Spes» which recognizes the autonomy of earthly affairs in its laws and values. At the same time, this autonomy should lead us to think that creation can be used without reference to God.

If humanity insists on limiting itself to an exclusively terrestrial view, this rejection of transcendence will lead to the alienation that also damages solidarity among people, notes the compendium, citing the encyclical of John Paul II «Centesimus Annus».

Religion and politics

To establish the correct vision of what the role of the Church in social issues is is another of the introductory points treated by the compendium. The Church serves the Kingdom of God through the proclamation of evangelical values. However, "this temporal dimension of the Kingdom is incomplete if it is not related to the Kingdom of Christ present in the Church and oriented towards its fullness eschatological" (No. 50).

Therefore, the Church should not be confused with a political community and is not limited to any political system. "It can be said that the distinction between religion and politics and the principle of religious freedom constitutes a specific achievement of Christianity and one of its fundamental historical and cultural contributions" (No. 50).

The coming of the Kingdom of God, explains the next issue, cannot be found in a particular social, political or economic organization. "Rather, it is witnessed by the development of a social human sense that for men is a yeast of integral fulfillment, of justice and solidarity, in the opening to the transcendent as a point of reference for their own definitive personal fulfillment".

Part of the church mission

The Church is involved in social issues as part of its role in sharing the joys and

hopes, anxieties and sorrows of men and women of every place and time (No. 60). In this context the Church seeks to proclaim the Gospel, for the society is composed of men and women who are the way of the Church (No. 62).

This concern about social issues does not mean that the Church is deviating from its mission. The redemption that is part of the salvific mission of the Church is certainly of the supernatural order, observes the compendium. However, the supernatural is not something that begins where the natural ends but is an ascension from the natural to a higher order. "In this way, nothing of the created or the human order is strange or is excluded from the supernatural or theological order of faith or grace, rather they are found within it, assumed and elevated by it" (No. 64).

Thus, it observes the number 66, the social doctrine is an integral part of the evangelization of the Church. The plan of redemption touches on questions of justice and charity. But there are limits to social doctrine. The Church, observes the number, does not intervene in "technical questions", does not propose systems or models of social organization.

The compendium also defends the right of the Church to proclaim its teaching on social issues. This proclamation is part of the Church's role as a teacher and the truths of its content come from human nature itself and the Gospel. The Church has a right, and a duty, to proclaim "the liberating word of the Gospel" (number 70), to the world.

A work in progress

The compendium notes that the social doctrine of the Church has been gradually formed over time, through a series of statements on various topics. This helps to understand that over time some changes have taken place regarding their nature and structure.

This process is still underway. In number 86 The compendium refers to social doctrine as a "workplace", in which "the perennial truth penetrates and permeates new circumstances, indicating ways of justice and peace."

But this teaching cannot be reduced to a socioeconomic environment. Social doctrine is theological and has its foundation in biblical revelation and the tradition of the Church (Nos. 72-4). In this sense, faith interacts with reason in a process in which "the Mystery of Christ illuminates the mystery of man" (No. 75). Together with revelation and tradition, the social doctrine is also enriched with philosophy and social sciences.

In his presentation of the compendium, Cardinal Renato Martino indicated that the document "is now available to all--Catholics, other Christians, people of goodwill--who seek safe signs of truth to better promote the social good of people and societies '.

A more necessary task than ever.