

THE COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

A SUMMARY 2

EXCERPTS FROM:
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The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* offers a complete overview of the fundamental framework of the doctrinal corpus of Catholic social teaching. Faithful to the authoritative recommendation made by the Holy Father John Paul II in No. 54 of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, the document presents "in a complete and systematic manner, even if by means of an overview, the Church's social teaching, which is the fruit of careful Magisterial reflection and an expression of the Church's constant commitment in fidelity to the grace of salvation wrought in Christ and in loving concern for humanity's destiny" (*Compendium*, 8).

The *Compendium* has a simple and straight-forward structure. After an *Introduction*, there follow three parts. The first, composed of four chapters, deals with the fundamental presuppositions of social doctrine -- God's plan of love for humanity and society, the Church's mission and the nature of social doctrine, the human person and human rights, and the principles and values of social doctrine. The second part, composed of seven chapters, deals with the contents and classical themes of social doctrine -- the family, human work, economic life, the political community, the international community, the environment and peace. The third part, which is quite brief, with just one chapter, contains a series of recommendations for the use of social doctrine in the pastoral activity of the Church and in the life of Christians, above all the lay faithful. The *Conclusion*, entitled "For a Civilization of Love", is an expression of the underlying purpose of the entire document.

The *Compendium* has a specific goal and is characterized by certain objectives spelled out in No. 10 of the *Introduction*. The document "is presented as an instrument for the moral and pastoral discernment of the complex events that mark our time; as a guide to inspire, at the individual and community levels, attitudes and choices that will permit all people to look to the future with greater trust and hope; as an aid for the faithful concerning the Church's teaching in the area of social morality" (*Compendium*, 10). It is moreover an instrument put together for the precise purpose of promoting "new strategies suited to the demands of our time and in keeping with human needs and resources. But above all there can arise the motivation to rediscover the vocation proper to the different charisms within the Church that are destined to the evangelization of the social order, because 'all the members of the Church are sharers in this secular dimension'" (*Compendium*, 10).

A point worth emphasizing, because it is found in various parts of the document, is the following: the text is presented as *an instrument for fostering ecumenical and interreligious dialogue* on the part of Catholics with all who sincerely seek the good of mankind.

Obviously, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* concerns Catholics first of all, for "the first recipient of the Church's social doctrine is the Church community in its entire membership, because everyone has social responsibilities that must be fulfilled ... In the tasks of evangelization, that is to say, of teaching, catechesis and formation that the Church's social doctrine inspires, it is addressed to every Christian, each according to the competence, charisms, office and mission of proclamation that is proper to each one" (*Compendium*, 83). Social doctrine also implies responsibility regarding the construction, organization and functioning of society: political, economic and administrative duties, or duties of a secular nature that belong to the lay faithful in a particular way because of the secular nature of their state of life and vocation. By means of this responsibility, the laity put social doctrine into practice and fulfill the Church's secular mission.

In the preparation of the *Compendium*, the question of the place of the Church's social doctrine in today's world was constantly raised. It is in this basic perspective that the *Compendium* has the high expectation of helping to bring about a discernment capable of responding to certain decisive challenges of great relevance and importance.

- a) *First is the cultural challenge, which social doctrine deals with by keeping in mind its constitutive interdisciplinary dimension.* Through her social doctrine the Church "proclaims the truth about Christ, about herself and about man, applying this truth to a concrete situation".

The truth of the Gospel needs to be brought into contact with the various branches of human knowledge because faith is not foreign to reason. The historical fruits of justice and peace develop when the light of the Gospel filters through and enters the fabric of human cultures, respecting the mutual autonomy of faith and knowledge, but also heeding their analogous connections.

Modern culture rejects any kind of "closed" system, but at the same time it is in search of reasoned explanations. The Church's social doctrine is not "a closed system".

- b) *The second challenge arises from ethical and religious indifference and the need for renewed interreligious cooperation.* At the social level, the most important aspects of widespread indifference are the separation between ethics and politics and the conviction that ethical questions have no place in the public arena, that they cannot be the object of rational political debate, held as expressions of individual, even private, choices. By extension, the separation between ethics and politics tends to be applied as well to the relationship between politics and religion, which is assigned to the realm of private matters.

In this area the Church's social doctrine has an arduous task to fulfill today and in the near future, a task that is more easily engaged if it is undertaken in dialogue with other Christian professions and even with non-Christian religions. Interreligious cooperation will be one of the paths of great strategic value for the good of humanity and decisive in the future of social doctrine. Looking through the eyes of Christian wisdom at the events of the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium, we can, as the Holy Father has indicated, identify at least one historical area of primary importance for interreligious dialogue in the social sphere. This is the area of peace and human rights.

It is sufficient here to recall the reference in his Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace, where the Holy Father wrote: "The various Christian confessions, as well as the world's great religions, need to work together to eliminate the social and cultural causes of terrorism. They can do this by teaching the greatness and dignity of the human person, and by spreading a clearer sense of the oneness of the human family. This is a specific area of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation, a pressing service which religion can offer to world peace".

In the near future, the areas of human rights, peace, social and economic justice, and development will be increasingly at the centre of interreligious dialogue. Catholics will be called to participate in this dialogue with their social doctrine, understood as a "doctrinal corpus" that prompts, but is also nurtured by, "the fruitful activity of many millions of people, who ... have sought to make that teaching the inspiration for their involvement in the world".

- c) *The third challenge is a properly pastoral challenge.* The future of the Church's social doctrine in the modern world will depend on the continually renewed understanding of this social doctrine as being rooted in the mission proper to the Church; of how this doctrine is born from the Word of God and from the living faith of the Church; of how it is an expression of the Church's service to the world, in which the salvation of Christ is to be proclaimed in word and deed. It depends on the renewed understanding, therefore, of how this doctrine is connected with all aspects of the Church's life and action: the sacraments, the liturgy, catechesis, and pastoral activity. The Church's social doctrine, which "is an essential part of the Christian message", must be known, propagated and lived.

Concluding this presentation of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* with these reflections on the role of the Church's social doctrine in today's world as it faces the new challenges of evangelization, I would like to emphasize a twofold dimension of the presence of Christians in society, a twofold inspiration that comes to us from this social doctrine itself and that in the future will increasingly need to be lived in a complementarity that brings many different aspects together. I am referring to the need for personal witness on the one hand, and, on the other, to the need for the planning of new programmes for an authentic humanism that involves social structures. These two dimensions, personal and social, must never be separated.

Personal witness -- fruit of an "adult" Christian life, profound and mature -- cannot fail to undertake also the task of building a new civilization, in dialogue with the various branches of human knowledge, in dialogue with other religions and with all people of good will to bring about an integral humanism marked by solidarity.