

DIGNITAS HUMANA

Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace

Christchurch Diocese, June 2005

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace released the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* in Rome on October 25, 2004. On its release Cardinal Renato Martino, President of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, stated that the compendium provides 'a complete overview of the fundamental framework of the doctrinal corpus of catholic social teaching'. The Cardinal traced the origin of the document to the recommendation made by Pope John Paul II in *Ecclesia in America*, 1999, he paid tribute to his predecessor, Cardinal Nuyen Van Thuan of Vietnam as the main author of the *Compendium*.

Although Pope Pius XI first used the term 'social doctrine' the origins of Catholic social teaching can be found in Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*, 1892. Since that time, succeeding Popes have developed catholic social doctrine through a number of documents of greater or lesser authority. The late Holy Father made a significant contribution to the development of the doctrine through his various writings and pronouncements. The purpose of the *Compendium* is to gather the essence of all these documents together in one place so that anyone concerned with a particular social issue can refer to the Church's teaching on the matter. The role of social doctrine is not to provide absolute answers to social questions, but to provide a set of tools with which to answer moral questions. The structure of the *Compendium* makes it clear that social doctrine is firmly rooted in the theology of the Church and is not some kind of 'third way' for solving political problems.

The *Compendium*, however, goes further than this and states that the Church's social doctrine should also be a guide in the mission of the New Evangelization so that the pastoral role of the social teaching will not only help men and women discover the truth, but will also encourage Christians to 'bear witness with a spirit of service to the Gospel in the field of social activity' (No. 525). It also states that social teaching has a vital role in Christian formation, particularly for those who have responsibilities in social and public life. In order for this to occur, the *Compendium* urges that social doctrine receive greater priority in catechesis so that the faithful are better instructed on the subject. The *Compendium* also notes that social teaching can be a useful instrument in ecumenical dialogue, and in dialogue between the Church and the civil world. Defending the dignity of the human person, promoting peace and helping the poor improve their lot are seen to be fields of action where cooperation with others can promote Christian unity.

Those who take time to examine the *Compendium* will not find it easy reading and certainly not a book to be read in one sitting. It is most likely to be used as a reference so that when a Catholic person is confronted with a social issue upon which they would like to seek guidance, they can refer to the relevant part or parts of the *Compendium*.

The *Compendium*, which is over 350 pages long, deals with every aspect of the Church's social doctrine, although for a full treatment of many of the issues it will be necessary to go back to the original source documents on which it is based. Nevertheless, in the *Compendium* one can find the theological basis of the Church's social teaching and the various subsets of the doctrine. The dignity of the human person and the human rights of individuals lies at the head of the treatment of the practical elements of social doctrine. The *Compendium* goes on to examine the principle of the common good, the universal destination of all goods, the principle of subsidiarity, rights of participation in social life, the principle of solidarity and the fundamental values of social life. It then turns its attention to the family which is described as the 'vital cell of society'. Human work, economic life and the political community occupy a substantial part of the work, as does social doctrine with respect to the international community, the promotion of peace and safeguarding the environment. The *Compendium* concludes by examining social doctrine and ecclesial action, particularly the construction of a 'civilization of love'. In this regard it says (No. 580) that 'the immediate purpose of the Church's social

doctrine is to propose the principles and values that can sustain a society worthy of the human person’.

Since the Vatican first announced that it was going to produce a comprehensive statement of Catholic social doctrine, the Christchurch Diocese Commission for Justice and Peace has waited many years for the arrival of the *Compendium* to help it in its mission to comment meaningfully on the many social issues with which it is confronted. Not only does the *Compendium* assist in this, but it provides a ready reference to all Catholics, priests and laity alike, who are seeking a framework to help them find out what the Church has to say on social issues both large and small.

Foundations of the Church’s Social Doctrine

Introduction

It is often said that Catholic social doctrine (CSD or Catholic social teaching as it is sometimes known) is the Church’s best kept secret. With the publication of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 2004, there should now be little excuse for Catholics not to be aware of the major principles of CSD. The *Compendium* is, however, a very substantial text and many people will find it challenging. In order to provide a way of unlocking the wisdom of the *Compendium* and the even more substantial documents on which it is based, it is proposed here to give a brief introduction to the nature and principles of CSD.

What is CSD?

CSD can be described in many ways. In essence, however, it is the means by which the Church offers ‘a contribution of truth to the question of man’s place in nature and human society ...’ (*Compendium* No 14). Another way of putting this is that CSD provides a vision of a just society that is located in the Gospels and in the teaching of the Magisterium as the Church has accompanied people in their progress through history. While the theological and moral truths which underpin CSD remain immutable, they must be expressed in a way which responds to changing social conditions. CSD is not therefore an alternative political path for ordering society, but provides the theological and moral tools which enable us to exercise right judgment when confronted with social phenomena and to act in accordance with that right judgment.

In writings on CSD Cardinal Joseph Cardijn’s injunction ‘SEE, JUDGE, ACT’ is often invoked as the appropriate way in which to respond to social matters requiring the application of Catholic doctrine. To put it another way, CSD provides principles for reflection, criteria for judgment and guidelines for action. The principles for reflection are universal and unchanging, but the guidelines for action will vary because societies differ and change over time creating new situations with different problems and possibilities. Guidelines for action are always depend on contingent judgments and the availability of information. There is often scope for legitimate differences of opinion among Catholics on a range of social justice issues.

Principles of CSD

As the *Compendium* says (No 160) ‘the permanent principles of the Church’s social doctrine constitute the very heart of Catholic social teaching.’ It goes on to identify the permanent principles as:

- the dignity of the human person;
- the common good;
- subsidiarity; and solidarity

The dignity of the human person

The dignity of the human person is described by the Compendium (No 160) as 'the foundation of all the other principles and content of the Church's social doctrine ...' This is because each person is created in the image and likeness of God and so has an inalienable, transcendent God-given dignity. It follows that each member of the human family is equal in dignity and has equal rights because we are all God's children. It also follows from this that each person must be treated as an end in him or herself and never as a means to an end. Human dignity leads to human freedom, but the exercise of this freedom is limited only by the moral law. This law is 'of a universal character, that precedes and unites all rights and duties'. (Compendium No 140). In their exercise of this freedom 'men and women perform morally good acts that are constructive for the person and for the society when they are obedient to truth, that is, when they do not presume to be the creators and absolute masters of truth or ethical norms.' (Compendium, No 138).

The common good

Since human beings are social creatures they live their individual lives in communion with others in societies which vary both in nature and political organisation. The common good indicates 'the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily.' (Compendium, No 164 citing *Gaudium et Spes* 26.) A society which intends to serve all individuals at every level has the common good as its primary goal. This means that all men and women must have the right to participate in all aspects of society and must contribute towards the creation of the common good, as well as enjoying its fruits.

Subsidiarity

Given that society is composed of many groups and networks of people ranging from the family to social and professional organisations it is apparent that these groups must be allowed a certain freedom of action if both they and the wider society which they serve are to flourish. The principle of subsidiarity therefore proposes that societies of a higher order must not interfere in societies of a lesser order unless this can be shown to contribute to the better development of the common good. Indeed, the *Compendium* makes it clear that 'societies of a superior order must adopt attitudes of help ("subsidiarity") – therefore of support, promotion, development – with respect to lower-order societies'. (Compendium, No 186.) The state, for example, must not interfere with the way in which families order themselves, unless such interference is likely to promote the common good and thus enhance the dignity of individual family members.

Solidarity

Solidarity refers to the bond which exists between individuals in societies large and small, national and international. It speaks particularly to the 'bond of interdependence between individuals and peoples at every level'. (Compendium, No 109). This interdependence is not, however, some vague notion of sympathy, compassion or distress at the plight of others, but a true commitment to work in a concrete way in promoting the national and international common good. Solidarity is therefore an expression of real concern about the plight of others and involves a duty to work actively for the eradication of poverty, strife and injustice. Furthermore, according to the *Compendium* (No 195) solidarity exists not just in relation to those who march alongside each other in this period of history but also in relation to future generations. This reinforces the notion that we do not own the earth and its resources, but are merely temporary stewards of God's creation.

Conclusion

In this short description of the permanent principles of CSD it has been possible only to scratch the surface of the Church's social teaching. Furthermore, a description of the permanent principles does not give much guidance on how they are to be applied in concrete social situations. In each issue of *Dignitas Humana*, however, the Christchurch Diocese Commission for Justice and Peace attempts to give an indication of how CSD is applied to various current, and often pressing, social issues. As Catholics we all have a duty to examine social developments through the lens of CSD and it is the

hope of Cardinal Martino, who finished preparing the *Compendium*, that it will aid this process.

The Kyoto Protocol and Catholic Social Teaching

This international agreement aims to combat global warming by curbing the amount of air pollution which majority scientific opinion sees as its cause. The Earth Summit in 1992 agreed on the need to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous human-made interference with climate systems. The main four gases being released into the atmosphere at a faster rate than they can be absorbed, and so affecting the climate, are carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and perfluorocarbons.

The Kyoto protocol was developed to give effect to the 1992 agreement five years later at another international meeting at Kyoto, Japan. It is a legally binding agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It commits industrialized countries to reduce emissions of six identified greenhouse gases by 5% by 2012. Parties to the agreement must design and implement programmes for mitigating and adapting climate change: they must prepare a national inventory of emission removals by carbon sinks: they must promote the transfer of climate friendly technology: they must also foster partnerships in research and observation in regard to climate science and impact and response strategies.

Countries have one by one ratified the Protocol, New Zealand doing so in December 2002. Only recently has the Protocol come into force, following its ratification by Russia in November, 2004. Some 141 countries, accounting for 55% of greenhouse gas emissions, have now ratified the Protocol.

Catholic teaching sees that each generation has a stewardship role in regard to the natural environment and resources. The seventh commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. The dominion of humans over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of one's neighbour, including generations to come. (see No 2415 Catechism of the Catholic Church).

Speaking at the United Nations on 21 November, 2001, on the topic of the environment and sustainable development, the then Archbishop Martino said on behalf of the Holy See. "Global warming, as it is popularly called, is global in scale. It recognises no boundaries, no nationalities, no cultural divides. It is the great equalizer with unpleasant consequences. Responses to such a phenomenon must reflect our interdependence and common responsibility for the present and the future of our planet."

Some see the Protocol as flawed because large developing countries such as China, Brazil and India are not required to meet specific targets because they have not contributed greatly to the problem. Others question the science and modelling that has led to the present view of the global warming situation. Another criticism of the Protocol is that some major offenders, in terms of producing greenhouse gases, have decided to put sectional interest ahead of the common good and refuse to join. However, given the seriousness of the issue, the precautionary principle seems sound and prudent which ensures that some international cooperation to prevent environmental degradation is better than none.

Prisoners' and Victims' Claims Bill

This proposed bill creates specialised schemes for the award and receipt of monetary compensation in respect of claims brought by prison inmates, due to abuse they have suffered in prison, and for civil proceedings against prisoners who receive such compensation by the victims of their offending. The bill also suspends the operation of limitation periods or claims against prison inmates by victims, for the period of an inmate's imprisonment.

The proposed bill is an inadequate attempt to offer compensation for victims of crime as it relies on the continuing abuse of prisoners. If abuse of prisoners is stopped there will be no monetary compensation available to pass onto victims of crime.

The proposed legislation will make it more difficult for prisoners to make claims for abuse than at present and also the knowledge that any compensation made to them will be passed onto their victims will make it less likely that claims will be made.

An important principle at stake relates to the human dignity of the prisoner. We do not earn our human dignity through good or bad behaviour. We all possess this dignity due to our common humanity. (Compendium, No 160)

It is necessary to protect human rights of prisoners precisely because some of their freedoms have been taken away and, as a result they are extraordinarily vulnerable to abuses of power.

The bill intends to amend the human rights act, which will make the human rights of prisoners less than those of others in society. The State must ensure that those in their care are treated humanely. It is unacceptable to have prisoners abused by those entrusted to care for them.

In recent years there has been a growing number of reports expressing concern about treatment of prisoners in New Zealand. These include United Nations reports, Ombudsman reports and the Human Rights 2004 Report.

The increasing number of court cases awarding punitive damages to prisoners who have demonstrated that they have been mistreated is a worrying concern.

Our society has not found a way of effectively compensating victims of crime, who are often left with their hurt and pain unresolved whatever the outcomes of the justice system. We need to find a better process to support, assist and compensate victims of crime than is found in this bill.

Overseas Aid

'The development of peoples has the Church's close attention, particularly the development of those people who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfilment. Following on the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, a renewed consciousness of the demands of the Gospel makes it her duty to put herself at the service of all, to help them grasp their serious problem in all its dimensions, and to convince them that solidarity in action at this turning point in human history is a matter of urgency'.

This opening paragraph from the Encyclical Letter, *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples) sets out in the clearest of terms the stance of the Church towards the eradication of poverty and ignorance in the world. How to implement this bold ideal is the challenge in this the Third Millennium.

It is now becoming more and more evident, that affluence and poverty do not just happen, and that the 'trickle down theory' that wealth earned by some of the community is bound to spread to all of the community is erroneous. What is now realised is that the same processes that create wealth or power for some can create poverty or powerlessness for others. Even in New Zealand, in general, there is a polarising process going on between the wealthy and the destitute. The growth of the urban poor, the rising number of families on social welfare, spell out the same message; that a society bent on acquiring affluence must work to benefit those who are not well off, and it will best do this by educating peoples' attitudes, and through appropriate economic structures. This same process operates between nations, so that to think of rich-poor in terms of charity, or of 'them sooner or later catching up with us' is to refuse to acknowledge reality and has become a form of social blindness. The demands of the Gospel make it essential that these issues are confronted with the same urgency with which Christ warned those in positions of power in Palestine.

Eucharist means thanksgiving, gratitude, appreciation. It is a total response to God for receiving all things at His hands. Thus to celebrate the Eucharist implies an attitude of appreciation and sharing in regard to possessions and ownership of goods. The authentic Christian response is one of gratitude

and a desire to share rather than to merely give. Sharing carries the hint of giving what already belongs to another or at least what is equally owned by everyone. It carries no hint of superiority nor any 'pat on the back' for doing good. This intuitive sense about what it means to own things or to hold power in one's hands needs to be clearly seen in the lifestyle of Christians and of the Church. It is captured in Catholic Social Teaching on solidarity, which refers to the bond which exists between individuals in societies large and small, national and international, "the bond of interdependence between individuals and peoples at every level". (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church No 109)

In other words, even beyond national frontiers, those who have more, those who have a greater portion of goods and common services must feel responsible for the weaker and be prepared to share what they possess with them. This demands great generosity on the part of the rich. Are we prepared to support out of our own pocket, works and undertakings organised in favour of the most destitute? Are we ready to pay higher taxes so that the public authorities can intensify their efforts in favour of development? Are we willing to pay a higher price for imported goods so that the producer may be more justly rewarded? The same duty of solidarity that rests on individuals exists also for nations. Justice demands that advanced nations, which includes our own, have a grave responsibility to help developing peoples.

New Zealand as a member nation has committed itself to achieving the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. One of the goals New Zealand has pledged itself to is an increase of its Overseas Development Aid to 0.7% of its Gross National Income (GNI). Currently, this aid amounts to only 0.23% of its GNI which leaves us languishing in 16th position of the 22 OECD member nations. It is disappointing that our Government is one of the least generous among developed countries when it comes to giving long term development to the poorer nations.

As a first step The Council for International Development is calling on the Government to increase development aid in the 2005-06 Budget to 0.28% of GNI. If it is to honour its promise to reach the 0.70% target by 2015, the Government should take steps now to do so.

DIGNITAS HUMANA

Issue: VII *The name of the newsletter, which is Latin for the dignity of the person, expresses the cornerstone principle of Catholic Social Teaching: "the human person...is and ought to be the principle, the subject and the end of all social institutions." No 1881, Catechism of the Catholic Church.*