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THE CHURCH’S SOCIAL DOCTRINE. CONSIDERATIONS FOR GEOGRAPHY AND ITS TEACHING IN SCHOOLS¹

The publication of the *Compendium*

After five years work by Vatican experts², the *Compendium of the Church’s social doctrine* was published on the 25th October 2004, and represents in practice a synthetic, systematic and updated catechism concerning the main points of the catholic social doctrine. The volume, “*indispensable to announce and bring the Gospel up to date in the complex network of social relations*”, constitutes, according to the intentions of the promoters, “*a useful instrument for the moral and pastoral discernment of the complex events characterising our times*”³.

¹ It is almost twenty years since the Institutes of Geography of the University of Krakow and the “Sapienza” of Rome signed a collaboration agreement, which made it possible to build up a really important patrimony of exchanges and meetings. Over the past years I have participated in the writing of a book in honour of my good friend Bronisław Kortus and it is with great pleasure today that I present this article to honour another eminent master of Polish geography: Antoni Jackowski.

² The work, which began under the presidency of the late Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyễn Van Thuân, was concluded with Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino.

³ The volume is divided into three parts: the first concerns the fundamental assumptions of the social doctrine; the second the contents and classical themes of the social doctrine (the family, human work, economic life, political community, the international community, the environment and peace), while the third one concerns, very briefly, a series of indications for the use of the social doctrine in the Church’s pastoral activity and in the life of Christians, especially laical followers.

During his presentation of the work, Cardinale Renato Raffaele Martino, President of the Pontifical Council of Justice, listed “some of the challenges” that the Compendium intends to answer: *“The first challenge is the cultural one, which the social doctrine deals with availing itself of its interdisciplinary constitutive dimension. The second challenge arises from the situation of ethical and religious indifference and from the need for renewed inter-religious collaboration. The third challenge is really pastoral. The future of the Church’s social doctrine in today’s world will depend on the continuous reconsideration of the radication of the social doctrine in the very mission of the Church”*⁴.

There are many themes dealt with in the volume, all of which are very topical. In fact, the various theological, philosophical and moral aspects are referred to social questions. In this way, the great problems that humanity is faced with find some possible answers in the moral dimension.

Peace and conflicts, terrorism and globalisation, human rights and new technologies, international solidarity and development, democratic participation and the migration phenomenon, interdependence and the minority groups, hunger and the environment are only some of the problems dealt with. They do not cover all the themes of the Church’s social doctrine, but represent those more closely connected to geography and the man-society-environment relationship.

Geography and the moral dimension

As geography focuses its attention on man who lives and works on Earth, it should immediately grasp and make a detailed study of the various changes, contradictions, conflicts and new territorial imbalances arising as a result of the relentless technological progress and new spatial approaches. Biological research too, with new discoveries and increasingly innovative applications, presents a series of unheard of scenarios, which can produce original impulses and different positions in the man-nature relationship. The extraordinary power of transformation of the food chains, made possible by modern technology, gives man a truly enormous potential of dominion.

In the scientific debate going on at present in geography, some reflection on these themes can be extremely fruitful, in so much that it focuses the attention towards the moral dimension. In fact, it seems more and more important to make a detailed assessment of man’s behaviour with regard to nature, of the conscious choices that man makes between equally possible actions, but deriving from different principles and moral standards.

⁴ *“The defence of democratic values – highlighted Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino – can be reached by means of the protection of the weak in every corner of the earth and the support of a policy concerned not only with the rights of single persons, but also of peoples, respected in their history, their traditions and their customs”.*

The relations between man and nature and society and territory cannot be defined in terms of simple material growth, considered as an absolute value and left to its internal dynamism. Often the quality of nature, cultural diversities, memories of the past and the attention to the future are sacrificed to economic growth, for the most part evaluated in quantitative terms of possession and interpreted as an instrument of well-being for the realisation of social-economic and political stability. In this sense the Church's social doctrine, as expressed in the *Compendium*, takes on great importance.

In the context of the moral dimension and solidarity, moments that are only apparently separate like peace, development, environment and human rights find close interconnections. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the "geography of values", both by aiming research at important social targets, by enriching the knowledge and competences in this perspective and by involving wider social strata, starting with schools. The ethical dimension draws the geographer's attention to look for strong themes, like the culture of the territory, comparison and responsibility; the revaluation of environmental and cultural diversity; the improvement of the quality of life; globalisation placed in the context of real social-economic justice; sustainable development...

Teachers do not only have the task of transmitting specific knowledge about different school subjects to their pupils but also that of formulating a project in which the educational objectives of a general nature are presented in an affective-relational and ethical-social consideration. The coherence and balance between the educational and the didactic importance are essential, as they give sense and meaning to the information, the tasks and the knowledge that the student gets from the subjects, and which would otherwise risk being deprived of their context. Obviously it is fundamental that the education system is hinged on objectives, referred to specific values that can be linked to reality, to guide-values that are necessary to face future challenges with. By means of a series of didactic operations the teachers inevitably touch the area of values; every subject is loaded with educational valences, or that is to say, it is reconsidered, revised and partially restructured according to the educational moment, and therefore according to the development of the person. The passage into the field of values must be adequately considered, as it is a particularly delicate task; the subject, in fact, must not be used as a subordinate transmission vehicle of some dominant, but arguable, values to the new generations and it must not be subject to ideological or propagandistic temptations, to the point of losing its qualities as a scientific subject.

What possibilities are there for an active and formative geography? In reality the potential is enormous; the teacher's educational-didactic task is facilitated by geography in the interpretation of the territory, situated at the various scales and in the knowledge of the relations that man and society have with the environment. These represent complex objectives, rich in contents, which are indispensable for the formation of frames of mind that are useful both for the critical analysis of the local and global realities in which we live, and for the debate relative to

the big problems of society: the protection of the environment and the man-nature reciprocity, the concern over the consequences of man's action, the development of peoples, the new cultural realities and human rights.

These are problems that can be linked back to concrete values, rich in critical stimulations, which even though following different courses all to be explored, lead to the need to understand the changes in the world. In order to reach this objective, however, the students have to be given suitable instruments that can be used to understand what happens and to perceive what may happen over the next years. These issues have to be set in the moral dimension, in order to obtain the values with which it is possible to orientate the syllabus itself.

Interdependence, globalisation, peace

The *Compendium* shows all its force in this context, with the educational potentialities that can be expressed in the teaching of geography.

The relationship is significant, and well identified, between the interdependence of men and peoples (which has increased due to the growth of road networks and means of communication and the extraordinary progress in computer science) and the enormous inequalities between developed and developing countries⁵. Such disparities, furthermore, are also becoming greater in the industrialised countries (§ 362). Technological progress and new knowledge does not necessarily lead to real development, the accomplishment of which *“requires the cooperation among the single political communities”* (§ 446). With regard to this, in the *Compendium* it is stated: *“The ownership of new goods, coming from knowledge, technology and know-how, becomes more and more decisive, since on this is founded the wealth of the industrialised nations much more than on that of natural resources. The new technological and scientific knowledge must be put at the service of man's primary needs, so that the common patrimony of humanity may gradually grow”* (§ 179).

Our time is thus marked by the complex phenomenon of globalisation, which if on the one hand *“feeds new hopes”*, on the other gives rise to *“disturbing interrogatives”*; in any case this must not lead to new forms of colonialism (§ 366) nor can it neglect the future⁶. The globalisation of protection, essential rights, and equity is necessary.

⁵ *“The acceleration process of interdependence among persons and peoples must be accompanied by just as intense a commitment at an ethical-social level, in order to avoid the fatal consequences of a situation of injustice of planetary dimensions, destined to have negative effects also in those countries that are at the moment most favoured”* (§ 192).

⁶ *“In the age of globalisation the solidarity between generations must be strongly emphasised (...) Solidarity between generations demands action to be taken in global planning according to the principle of the universal destination of patrimonies, which makes it morally illicit and economically counterproductive to burden the future generations with the costs of today”* (§ 367).

One of the results of globalisation, which worsens the imbalance between rich and poor countries, is the increase of migrations of people searching for better living conditions; many perceive the arrival of foreigners in their land as a threat, not considering, on the other hand, that immigration *"can be a resource rather than an obstacle to development"* (§ 297). The institutions of the host countries must, furthermore, be careful *"that the temptation to exploit foreign labour does not spread"* (§ 298). There are also many other considerations concerning the human rights field, now extended to the rights of peoples and nations; the *"nation has a fundamental right to exist, to have its own language and culture"*, to model its life according to its own traditions (§ 157).

The problems arising between nations cannot be resolved by war in any way whatsoever⁷; the so-called preventive war is also strongly condemned as being outside strict international control (the reference to the new doctrine and the war started by the American President George W. Bush against Iraq is evident, although not explicit)⁸. The condemnation of terrorism is clear, especially when this is carried out in God's name. Peace, *"the fruit of justice and charity"* must be promoted in all ways possible.

Environment: a challenge for humanity

The Church authorities have expressed a line of continuity with regard to the protection of the environment, even if in the continuity of the tradition it has offered an interpretation of the environmental problem increasingly rich in new ferment⁹.

The research concerning the man-nature relationship must be accompanied by the affirmation of a new mentality promoting responsible and conscious confrontations with the need to respect nature and to make careful and sensible use of natural resources. This is a highly educational task, which also regards the world of schools; in an educational-didactic project, geography can take on a key role, as it represents a subject that helps to understand the spatial dimension in the various social, cultural and economic implications.

⁷ *"War is a scourge", for which it is "impossible to think that in the atomic age war can be used as an instrument of justice". And furthermore, "When it breaks out, war becomes a useless massacre, an adventure without return, which compromises the present and puts the future of humanity in jeopardy"* (§ 497).

⁸ *"As far as concerns, on the other hand, actions of preventive war, begun without solid evidence that an attack is about to be launched, it cannot help but pose serious questions at a moral and juridical level. Therefore, only a decision by the competent organisms on the basis of rigorous checks and well-founded motivations, can internationally legitimise the use of armed force, identifying certain situations as a threat to peace and authorising interference in the sphere of the reserved domain of a State"* (§ 501).

⁹ *"Man must not arbitrarily dispose of the earth, subjecting it to his will without reserve, as if it had no form of its own and an anterior destination given to it by God"* (§ 460).

In this case too it is necessary to search for, besides the various environmental references that can relate human activity and natural systems, an ethical dimension able to focus the children's attention on highly contradictory positions that are found with respect to the environment, and which unfortunately nowadays have a negative effect on its integrity. In many ways, in fact, man relies on a nature that was considered unlimited in its resources, behaving like he did at the dawn of history, only worrying about environmental disaster when personally being exposed to its negative consequences. This behaviour apparently comes into conflict with the trust that man places in his intelligence and ability to innovate, for which reason environmental degradation would turn out to be a necessary drawback for the immediate increase in consumption, but of short duration in the perspective of future technological progress.

The Church's social doctrine recommends an "attitude of caution", which makes it possible to carefully consider "*nature, objectives and methods of the various forms of applied technology*" (§ 458). Space and time must also be carefully assessed, as every kind of intervention in an area of the ecosystem cannot "*avoid considering the consequences in other areas and, in general, on the well-being of future generations*" (§ 459). And furthermore, the responsibility towards the environment, the common patrimony of the human being, "*not only extends to the needs of the present, but also to those of the future*" (§ 467).

It must be stressed that the temporal dimension, never unrelated to geography, transmits the concept of progress, evolution and change to space; and thus, time helps us to better interpret reality, subject to faster and faster transformations, by means of a coordination in different spatial scales: from the changes in one's own life, to those in one's own community, one's country and lastly in the world.

More and more often a state of conflict is recorded between the times and rhythms of nature and those of man, which is so strong as to make the society-environment relationship difficult and quite complicated, maintained in terms of general integrity until the assertion of the industrial revolution, when the state of equilibrium was progressively broken¹⁰. For this reason geographic-environmental education has another strong point in the evaluation of times, cycles and rhythms of nature, as well as in the study of the kinds of conflict between the times of nature and those of man.

The exploration of time also concerns the future (short and long term), above all under the profile of responsibility with regard to the future consequences

¹⁰ In the *Compendium* we can read: "*The plan for economic development must carefully consider the need to respect the integrity and the rhythms of nature, since natural resources are limited and some are non-renewable. The present rhythm of exploitation seriously compromises the availability of some natural resources for the present and the future*" (§ 470). "*The protection of the environment cannot be guaranteed on the basis of the financial costs benefits calculation*" (§470).

of the choices made in the present. This theme, which brings present and future together in the territory, deserves to be dealt with more thoroughly in schools by means of an investigation into the fears of young people concerning the future (both at a local and global level).

SPOŁECZNA DOKTRYNA KOŚCIOŁA. REFLEKSJE DLA GEOGRAFII I JEJ NAUCZANIA W SZKOŁACH

STRESZCZENIE

W październiku 2004 r. opublikowano *Kompendium doktryny społecznej Kościoła*, swoisty katechizm dotyczący głównych punktów katolickiej doktryny społecznej. Tom ten porusza wiele tematów: pokoju i terroryzmu, globalizacji i międzynarodowej solidarności, nowych technologii i rozwoju, migracji i współzależności, środowiska.

Geografia powinna podjąć szczegółowe studia zmian, sprzeczności, konfliktów i nowych nierówności terytorialnych wynikających z nieustannego postępu technologicznego i nowych podejść przestrzennych. Refleksja nad powyższymi zagadnieniami może być niezwykle owocna w geograficznych debatach, o ile kładzie nacisk na wymiar moralny.

Nauczyciele mają za zadanie przekazywać swoim uczniom wiedzę naukową z różnych szkolnych przedmiotów. W tym kontekście *Kompendium* wyraża całą swoją moc, potencjał edukacyjny, który może znaleźć swój wyraz w nauczaniu geografii.

Istotna jest współzależność ludzi i ludów; zjawisko globalizacji samo w sobie daje nadzieję, ale stawia również niepokojące wyzwania; odpowiedzialność za środowisko musi rozciągać się nie tylko na potrzeby współczesności, ale również przyszłości.

Tłumaczenie Bolesław Domański

