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LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR: THE HEART OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

1.- I am happy and honoured to be here, at the headquarters of UNESCO for this providential occasion which brings us together for the presentation of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, drawn up by the Pontifical Council « Justice and Peace » at the request of Jean-Paul II, the unforgettable Servant of God. I would like to thank the organisers of this meeting: His Excellency Mgr Jean-Charles Descubes, Mgr Francesco Follo, Permanent Observer to UNESCO, Monsieur Hervé l'Huillier, Président of Évangile & Société, and particularly our dear father Jacques Turck. This initiative is very significant and does credit to its organisers by the fact that it shows an openness to differences of opinions and to dialogue on the

difficult and complex issues associated with modern culture, the promotion of cultural rights and authorities deriving from a Christian social ethic.

2- I have been asked to focus the presentation of the *Compendium on* how love lies at the heart of the social doctrine of the Church. With a slight correction to the theme which was proposed to me, I would like to underline from the beginning that *love not only lies at the heart of social doctrine; but that it is the very heart*. Placed in this perspective, the fundamental objective of the social doctrine of the Church - *building a civilisation of love* - is fully revealed. In fact, the first commitment to which the social doctrine calls Christians is to diffuse love in social relations, at all levels and in all circles. Jesus teaches us that the fundamental law of human perfection, and therefore the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love »⁷ (cf. Mt 22,40; Jn 15,12; Col 3,14 ; Jc 2,8)⁸. *Love only can completely change man and society*⁹ (Cf n° .583).

3- *In the prospect of the civilisation of love, the Compendium offers itself as a manifesto for the realization of a new humanism*. To present it in this way does not seem at all exaggerated. In fact, in the introduction, it is stated that it was developed with the aim of advocating and sewing in the furrows of civilisation *a humanism complete, united and open to transcendence* (cf. n° 7). It is a *manifesto* in the sense that one can find therein the ideal and historic

⁷ Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 38 ; Cf id. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 42 ; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 826.

⁸ Pontifical Council Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church*, n° 580 and cf. n° 103.

⁹ Cf John-Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, 49-51.

coordinates for a new society, to give substance to the still vital demands of the Gospel and of Christianity. It is always necessary to translate empirically the essence of Christianity, in all cultural contexts and in all periods of history. The richness of the Gospel must revive and diffuse itself in *the social and cultural ethos of peoples*; for the hope of each generation, to nourish its commitment to grow in civilisation. In fact, in the current context of globalisation, the *Compendium* outlines for the human family *a complete and united humanism* and seeks to invest in the best part of the person and of all peoples, in the positive forces of history.

4- The *Compendium* is without doubt a complex and articulated text, which, given the organization of the present event, is impossible for me to present in all the greatness of its theme. Allow me, then, to recall briefly the *principles* - the central character of the human person, the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity - which the social doctrine presents as a fundamental and essential condition for realizing a society drawing its inspiration from the prospect of *a civilisation of love*. These principles are like the load-bearing pillars of *a social edifice* built according to designs proposed by the *Revelation* and by *natural law*, and to the geometry of the *Fides* and of the *Ratio*, and which support it entirely. The principles of social doctrine must therefore be considered in their *entirety*, without undue emphasis on one or the other, and they must be able at all times to be introduced into such or

such context and applied within the framework of the society¹⁰.

- a) *The personalist principle.* The *Compendium* states: « The Church sees in man, in each man, the living image of God Himself »¹¹. «Man, considered in his empirical historical aspect, represents the heart and soul of Catholic social education. All of social doctrine, in effect, develops from the principle which affirms the inviolable dignity of man»¹². The *personalist* principle is therefore concerned with the absolute dignity, the central character, the intangibility of man considered according to his essential characteristics as an *individual* and a *social being*; it should be *the subject, the basis and the object of all social actions*¹³: man should never be *abused*. Society should place itself *at his service*: It can also demand much from its members but should never use them. The *personalist* principle is realized in the promotion of *human dignity* at all levels against all types of economic, political, linguistic, racial, religious etc. discrimination, and in particular in the promotion of *fundamental human rights*, basic for all societies and a *priority* for all juridical organizations. Moreover, these rights must be considered as a reality which no law can transgress ; they should be recognised in their totality and in the anthropological perspective of a humanism which is complete, united and open to transcendence.

¹⁰ Cf PONTIFICAL COUNCIL « Justice and Peace », *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 160-163.

¹¹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL « Justice and Peace », *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 105

¹² PONTIFICAL COUNCIL « Justice and Peace », *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 107

¹³ Cf. PIE XII, *Christmas Radio message 1944*.

b) *The principle of the common good.* The common good is understood to be the ensemble of conditions which favourise the full development of the *person* and *intermediate bodies* - protection and promotion of human rights, of the family, of freedom of association, etc. Only the *united* effort of the whole of society - or of the community of Nations, in the case of international common good - can lead to the realization of these objectives. The *Compendium* states: « *The demands of the common good derive from the social conditions of each epoch and are strictly bound to the respect and full development of man and his fundamental rights. These demands concern above all a commitment to peace, the organization of state institutions, a sound legal system, protection of the environment, the provision of essential human services, of which certain are at the same time human rights: food, shelter, employment, education and access to culture, transport, health services, freedom of information, and protection of freedom of religion*»¹⁴. In order that the *common good* should not be confined exclusively to the care of politicians - who, in every case, invariably retain the primary responsibility - but that it remains the objective to which all men are called upon to share, it is important that a culture of participation be encouraged at all levels of social life. This «*expresses itself essentially by a series of activities through which the citizen, as an individual or in association with others, directly or by means of his representatives, contributes to the cultural, economic, social and political life of the civil community to which he belongs. This participation is a duty which all must conscientiously*

¹⁴ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL « Justice and Peace », *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 166

fulfill, in a responsible manner and with a view to the common good. It cannot be circumscribed or confined to a few specific constituents of social life »¹⁵.

- c) ***The principle of subsidiarity.*** The *Compendium* states « *This principle is necessary because every person, every family, and every intermediate body has something original to offer to the community. (...)* Certain forms of concentration, bureaucracy, assistance, unjustified and excessive state presence in the public system, are *contrary* to the principle of subsidiarity.(...) Corresponding to the application of subsidiarity are: the respect and effective development of the pre-eminence of the individual and the family; the valorization of intermediate associations and organizations, in their fundamental choices and in all the decisions which cannot be delegated or assumed by others; encouragement offered to private initiative, of the kind that all social bodies, with their own specificities, remain at the service of the common good; a pluralist articulation of society and the representation of its vital strengths; the protection of the rights of man and minorities; bureaucratic and administrative decentralisation; balance between the public and private spheres, with a corresponding recognition of the social fonction of the latter... »¹⁶. The principle of subsidiarity is therefore concerned with the role of aid - subsidiarity derives precisely from *subsidium*: aid - which the greater authority must offer to the fesser body: the public powers must only intervene when the initiative of individuals or intermediate groups finds itself unable to realize their

¹⁵ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL « Justice and Peace », *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 189.

¹⁶ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL « Justice and Peace », *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 1.87

projects independently. In a positive way, this principle underlines the value of *civil society* - families, groups, associations, businesses, charities, educational and religious institutions, etc. - compared with *political society*, chiefly regarding the state. Regarding the obligations of the state towards the civil society, already in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, the blessed John XXIII states that the action of public authority has a rôle « *of direction, stimulus, assistance, and integration*”¹⁷. In any case, one should not be under the illusion that all the state needs to do is withdraw in order for civil society to flourish automatically. Certain obligations must be fulfilled by a course of action which keeps together, either in a combined or complementary form, public and private initiative - health, education, aid - and the circumstances in which the state must in any case intervene - for example, when private enterprise is absent - and where it must not in any way interfere - for example in the administration of justice.

- d) ***The principle of solidarity.*** *The Compendium* states that solidarity is both an *ethical-social principle* and a *virtue*, a veritable and actual realization of *justice*¹⁸. This principle essentially consists in the consciousness of the fact that humanity constitutes a vast and complex *unity*, which takes priority over each individual and every thing, and is larger and more fundamental than that experienced or realized by any specific individual. It expresses itself in the awareness of a basic *interdependence* between all men, inviting everyone to an *effective apportioning* of goods,

¹⁷ JEAN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, part II, 2nd paragraph

¹⁸ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL « Justice and Peace », *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 193.

resources, responsibilities and difficulties in a climate of reciprocity and equality of rights and obligations: *solidarity as in being indebted to others* for what we have received from them; *solidarity as being with others and for others*, to answer to their needs. When interdependence is *is the firm and persistent determinant?* to commit to the *common good*: that is to say, for the good of one and all, for we are all entirely responsible for each other¹⁹. For the sake of us all, it is important to preserve genuine solidarity from its simplistic image, so widespread today: solidarity as public assistance, state control, an encouragement to parasitism, etc. Solidarity should express itself not only by individual means, but also through associations, communities and institutions.

5- Using these pillars, it is possible to construct the solid edifice of an organised society framed by the coordinates of *the civilisation of love and a complete and united humanism*. *it is possible, above all, to promote peace*. We can understand the *Compendiums* consideration of peace if we distinguish between peace defined as the absence of war, and peace as a way of life wholly humane. On several occasions, the document attributes the former meaning to peace, but it attributes much more, infinitely more to peace as taken in the latter meaning: For this is genuinely the « perfect» peace, which comprises truth, liberty and justice and is the only kind which also assures us of attaining peace as the absence of war. I don't believe I'm mistaken in stating that the *Compendium* always speaks of peace, even when the word itself is not used: it also speaks of peace when it speaks of justice or solidarity, of the unity of the human family, of God's design for mankind, of every man's rights and his respective duties, and of the dignity of the

¹⁹ Cf. JEAN-PAUL II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 38 (1987)

individual, of peoples and of cultures. In the *Compendium*, the word peace also acquires a strong cultural significance, so important today. The sense of mutual respect of religious traditions and cultures, the dialogue between religions, international cooperation, and the culture of welcome are all fundamental dimensions which further peace. According to the *Compendium*, therein lies the ultimate meaning of the construction of a shared social life, and therefore of peace²⁰.

6- All the teachings of the *Compendium* take their form and their inspiration from love, not only that love which cultivates *passing relationships* - direct and emotional contact with others - but above all that which cultivates *long-term relationships* - those upheld by cultural, political and economic institutions which are principally linked to a social and political commitment. The new commandment of love, on the one hand, invites us to rediscover the true face of that unknown person who lives nearby and, on the other hand, it instructs us to identify with our neighbour - even those whom we will never meet - through cultural, social, political and economic institutions. This dual aspect of Christian love, directly personal and indirectly institutional, can be found in the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lc 10, 30-37). The charity of the Samaritan is revealed in the utmost care with which the Samaritan approaches the wounded man lying on the road. The narration underlines this by slowing the rhythm so as to scrutinize each moment of the action: « But a certain Samaritan...came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. And he went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine... »(Lc 10, 33-34). The action of the good Samaritan, in identifying with his fellow man, does not end there in the direct contact with the victim: it goes beyond

²⁰ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL « Justice and peace », *compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. 494-496.

his physical presence as he takes charge of the cane given to him within a structure and with the appropriate personnel (*hotel and landlord*) and with the necessary economic resources (the two pence). That is *the social and political charity* which the *Compendium* describes in the following terms: « From many points of view, the neighbour which one should love introduces himself "*in society*" so that to truly love him, to answer to his needs or to his extreme poverty, can mean something quite different from the good that one would wish for him on a personal level: *love on a social scale signifies, according to the circumstances, making use of social intermediaries to improve his life or eliminate the social factors which are the cause of his poverty.* The works of mercy, by which one responds *here and now* to the real and urgent need of one's neighbour, are undeniably acts of charity, but the commitment to *organising and structuring* society in such a way that one's neighbour should never find himself destitute is an act of charity just as indispensable, especially when this destitution becomes the condition with which a large number of people must contend, even entire populations: this situation assumes today the proportions of a truly *global social question* »²¹. Thank you for your attention.

²¹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL « Justice and Peace », *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 208.