

# Implementing the Principles of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church* in Catholic Higher Education<sup>1</sup>

His Eminence Renato Raffaele Cardinal Martino

The purpose of this discussion is to share a reflection on the implementation of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in the ministry of Catholic higher education. In particular, I wish to highlight the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*<sup>2</sup> that was completed by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace at the request of the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II. Designed to be a user-friendly synthesis of the principles of CST, the *Compendium* has proven to be an extremely practical and substantial resource. It has now been translated into 40 different languages and is widely available throughout the world.

In a certain sense, the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church has been called “the Church’s best kept secret.” Why is this the case? Before the publication of the *Compendium*, perhaps because the social teachings of the popes were responding to specific situations (such as the circumstances of the workers at the end of nineteenth century examined by Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical *Rerum novarum*<sup>3</sup>), a well-structured exposition of the social doctrine of the Church did not exist. It was not until 1999 that Pope John Paul II, in his exhortation *Ecclesia in America*<sup>4</sup>, promised a document that would synthesize the social doctrine of the Church. He then asked the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace to prepare such a document—the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*—which was first released on October 25, 2004.

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Cardinal Martino is President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Roman Curia, Holy See, Vatican City.

<sup>1</sup> This article is a revision of a presentation delivered by His Eminence Renato Raffaele Cardinal Martino at the Fourth Annual ACCU Rome Seminar, June 16, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, DC, USCCB Publishing, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum: On Capital and Labor*, 1891.

<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesiae in America*, January 22, 1999.

As the Church looks toward a new springtime of faith, it is more necessary than ever before that the faithful understand the social and moral teachings of the Church. With these reflections, I offer a brief overview of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition (CIT) that includes the social doctrine of the Church. Then I shall discuss some of the specific principles that make up the substance of the *Compendium* and, finally, how the social doctrine of the Church can be implemented in Catholic higher education.

### **The Catholic Intellectual Tradition**

Faced with the triumphs and challenges of a globalized and increasingly secularized world, I believe there can be no better time for people of faith to “put out into the deep.”<sup>5</sup> There is no better time to rediscover the depth of truth that we possess as the Church of Jesus Christ; but, for whatever reason, many have not been able to understand or integrate this truth into their personal lives and into society as a whole. We understand, as the late Pope John Paul II wrote in his 1998 Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, that “human beings *can* come to a unified and organic vision of knowledge.”<sup>6</sup>

The Church has a rich body of teaching that reveals central truths to believers and nonbelievers alike. These truths teach us about who we are as individuals and as a human family. It is important for each of us who claim to follow Christ to endeavor to understand the Church’s teachings so that we may embrace the fullness of truth as revealed by God in Christ, and so that we may be, as Jesus himself told us, “the salt of the earth and the light of the world.”<sup>7</sup> The principles of Catholic social doctrine are part of the intellectual tradition of the Church. As explained by theologian and former president of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, Monika Hellwig (2000), this tradition of the Church is a “2000 year old conversation between the Church and the world, a dialogue between the Christian community of believers and the culture in which it finds itself.”<sup>8</sup> The tradition itself is broader and older than the formal institution of the Catholic university, but in large part the Catholic university has served as the steward of this “conversation,”

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 5:4.

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Fides et ratio: On Faith and Reason* (1998), n. 85.

<sup>7</sup> Matt: 5:13-16.

<sup>8</sup> Monika Hellwig, *Presentation on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University* (Fairfield: Sacred Heart University Press, 2000).

preserving, transmitting, and developing it by engaging the questions and challenges of its own time and place.

Hellwig (2000) explained that we can think of the CIT as comprising two main components: (1) Content, and (2) A Way of Doing Things. The *Content* refers to the classic treasures to be cherished, studied, and handed on; the *Way of Doing Things* is the outcome of centuries of experience, prayer, action, and critical reflection. I will explain each below in light of Hellwig's description.

The *Content* of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition cherishes, develops, and employs a valuable treasury of "texts." These include written texts, musical texts, art, customs and rituals, as well as modes of thought, expression and action. To elaborate further, we are talking here about the Sacred Scriptures, formulations of the faith elaborated in theology, philosophy, catechesis, religious drama, fiction, and poetry; the natural sciences that integrate faith claims with human knowledge; spirituality, rules of life, devotions, the lives of the saints; and of course, rituals and ceremonial texts. These are finished products that need to be maintained, supported, and explored. The CIT is committed to introducing new generations to these "texts."

The *Way of Doing Things* is the concrete response to the content that we treasure—the way of approaching knowledge that is the outcome of centuries of experience, prayer, action, and critical reflection. There are values and principles that are "characteristically Catholic" but at the same time shared by many religious traditions. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is not something we embrace and endeavor to promote to separate ourselves from other traditions and beliefs. As the famous American Jesuit preacher Walter Burghardt observed: "The body of Christ that is the Eucharist is not a private party, a me-and-Jesus two-step."<sup>9</sup>

As Catholics, to acquire true wisdom, to live well, and to build good societies involves embracing and sharing certain values and principles, such as: (1) human life has meaning, a meaning which can be known; (2) the basic principles of right and wrong are given and not humanly invented; (3) the deliberately fostered yearning for communion with God is in some way connected with the way we relate to one another; and (4) in the person of Jesus Christ we have the meaning and destiny of human life, of human relationship with God, and of what constitutes a good life.

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<sup>9</sup> Walter Burghardt, S.J. *Love is a Flame of the Lord* (Paulist Press, 1995), 73.

These basic values and principles of the Catholic tradition imply a deep commitment to the continuity of faith and reason and affirm that the rational search for truth is the search for God. Herein rests the heart of the matter when we talk, in particular, about Catholic higher education. Faith and reason are not opposed. We know this from CIT itself. But the tradition is, and needs to be, about more than that proclamation.

John Paul II, in a letter to the Pontifical Council for Culture in 1990, recalled: “A faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, and not faithfully lived.”<sup>10</sup> This distinctly reminds us that our culture is primary mission territory. Are we not, then, to consecrate learning to Christ? The response is “yes” because we believe that if this domain is consecrated, converted, it will mature into something like Christendom.

In the similar forum six years before, His Holiness had this to say:

The challenge of the 21st century is to humanize society and its institutions through the Gospel; to restore to the family, to cities and to villages a soul worthy of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God...The Christian leaven will enrich living cultures and their values and bring them to full flower. In this way, hearts will be penetrated and cultures renewed by Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, who has brought complete newness by bringing himself.<sup>11</sup>

## Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

The center of Catholic higher education must always be the “Good News”—the Gospel of Jesus. It is in this “Good News” that the Church finds the principles that form the basis of Catholic social doctrine. I would like to highlight just a few of these principles and discuss their implementation in Catholic higher education, namely: human dignity, the common good, and solidarity.

### *Human Dignity*

The first principle is *human dignity*. Catholic higher education has a unique opportunity and responsibility to implement this principle:

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<sup>10</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Discourse to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Discourse to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 1984.

Respect for human dignity helps young minds and hearts to recognize that every person, believer or not, has been fashioned in the image and likeness of Almighty God and is called to be an artisan and cocreator of society and culture. Related to this seminal notion of human dignity is the rich sense of human rights, enumerated in a number of social encyclicals but principally in *Pacem in terris*<sup>12</sup> of Pope John XXIII. Catholic human rights theory differs from a purely liberal theory in insisting on an important set of social and economic rights. This includes what are called positive rights to satisfy basic needs and encourage prosperity, and not just the negative rights to liberty from coercion and state restraints. In addition, CST closely joins rights to responsibilities because of the social nature of human dignity. We are interdependent beings, radically rather than incidentally.<sup>13</sup>

Reflection on the inherent and equal dignity of every person allows for an authentic vision of the value and limits of human freedom. The *Compendium* states that “man rightly appreciates freedom and strives for it passionately. Rightly does he desire and guide, by his own free initiative, his personal and social life, accepting personal responsibility for it. Freedom not only allows man to modify the state of things outside of himself, but also determines the growth of his being as a person through choices consistent with the true good.”<sup>14</sup>

### *The Common Good*

John Paul II wrote in *Ex corde Ecclesiae* that Catholic universities were “born from the heart of the Church,” and therefore their mission is to serve the Church and society.<sup>15</sup> This affirmation of the role of Catholic higher education calls to mind another principle of Catholic social doctrine highlighted in the *Compendium* and the key to our service to the Church and to the world: the *common good*. CST espouses the notion that the common good is central to the good society, a well-functioning state, and to the international order.

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<sup>12</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in terris: On establishing universal peace in truth, justice, charity, and liberty*, April 11, 1963 from [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html)

<sup>13</sup> See John Coleman, *Globalization and Catholic Social Thought*, (Ottawa: Novalis, 2005), 16.

<sup>14</sup> *Compendium*, n. 135.

<sup>15</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae: On Catholic Universities* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1990), ¶ 1.

Saint Augustine, in *City of God*,<sup>16</sup> described the relationship between Christianity and social and political life, and he did so with a deep love and appreciation for the Sacred Scriptures and the Church. In this work Augustine reflected the growing maturity of Christian thinking and provided an example of “how one Christian thinker thought about the community of Christians, the Church, in relation to the society in which he lived.”<sup>17</sup> Unlike other treatises on the common good, Augustine did not defend an idea or a set of beliefs; instead, he promoted the existence of a real community, ordered in a specific way, with a specific purpose, way of life, and form of worship. “All the components of society, whether the family, the neighborhood, civic associations, or legal and political institutions, are directed to a common end,”<sup>18</sup> described in Sacred Scripture as, “Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.”<sup>19</sup>

Centuries later, Saint Thomas Aquinas, in *Summa Contra Gentiles*,<sup>20</sup> examined the relationship between creation and salvation, between the love of God and love of neighbor.<sup>21</sup> He posited that because all people are ordered toward union with God, creation necessitates a mutual sharing, rooted in love, of the blessings bestowed by God upon the human family. Saint Thomas therefore defined society as a system of mutual exchange of services for the common good.<sup>22</sup> Drawing from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Saint Thomas described union with God as the absolute good that is natural to everyone, motivating people to do good for others. He stated that it is possible for human beings to know their capacity to love and act in relationship with God and human beings. Moved by love and knowledge, we can *go out to the world* and reach out to other people, to the men, women, and children who also

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-194.

<sup>19</sup> Ps. 144:15.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, book III, chapter 117.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Hugh McDonald, *Thomas Aquinas on the Common Good: Man is by Nature a Social Being* <http://www.vaxxine.com/hyoomik/aquinas/commongood.html> (accessed October 27, 2006). McDonald explains that man has an innate capacity to live in society with others. In fact, man cannot attain his well being outside of society. Whereas many writers use the term “common good” in a more material sense, McDonald points out that Saint Thomas saw the common good as primarily a spiritual good, as very much caught up in man’s relationship to God.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 3.

share with us not only this ultimate end and purpose of union with God, but the capacity of consciousness that goes with it. According to Aquinas, knowledge of *the truth about God* and *life in society* are rooted deeply within man's "*inclinationes naturales*."<sup>23</sup>

Thus, in the Catholic outlook, there is a presumption of goodness and truth connected to moral sensibility, and of the capacity of the human will to choose the right thing and the true good. Moreover, human beings not only have this capacity, they are morally bound to act in ways that reflect this capacity, not only for themselves but also for the good of others. As John Paul II affirmed in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, "When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a 'virtue,' is solidarity."<sup>24</sup>

### *Solidarity*

*Solidarity*, the third and final principle I highlight, assumes that human beings have real and pressing obligations to come to the aid and support of others, even when these others do not have formal and explicit rights to such aid. The *Compendium* states that "the social nature of human beings does not automatically lead to communion among persons, to the gift of self."<sup>25</sup> Because of pride and selfishness, man discovers in himself the seeds of asocial behavior and impulses leading him to close himself within his own individuality and to dominate his neighbor. Every society worthy of the name can be sure that it stands in the truth when all of its members, thanks to their ability to know what is good, are able to pursue it for themselves *and* for others. It is out of love for one's own good and for that of others that people come together in stable groups with the purpose of attaining a common good.<sup>26</sup> Such a notion of solidarity in the Catholic tradition is aligned with several other principles, such as the preferential option for the poor, subsidiarity, and the Catholic theories of justice.

The principles of *human dignity*, *the common good*, and *solidarity* are just a few of the principles that must guide a society worthy of the

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2: Leonine Edition, available from <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/index.html> (accessed December 7, 2006). The Catholic principal of the common good engages the Thomistic conception that the common good corresponds to the highest and most specific of human instincts.

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, "*Sollicitudo rei socialis*," no. 38.6, in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, J. Michael Miller, ed., (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1996), 492.

<sup>25</sup> *Compendium*, n. 150.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

human person. The *Compendium* offers a comprehensive reflection on these and other foundational principles that provide a more complete understanding of Catholic social doctrine. Of course, alongside these principles, the Church's social doctrine also indicates fundamental values such as truth, freedom, justice, and love. These are rightly called social values, and are inherent in the dignity of the human person, whose authentic development they foster. Putting these values into practice is the sure and necessary way of obtaining personal perfection and a more human social existence. "They constitute the indispensable point of reference for public authorities, who are called to carry out substantial reforms of economic, political, cultural, and technological structures and the necessary changes in institutions."<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

In this discussion, I have highlighted the principles of *human dignity, the common good, and solidarity*, and the values of *truth, freedom, justice and love* because these are at the heart of CST. These principles and values express the whole truth about the human person known by reason and faith, and are born from the "encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarized in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbor in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society."<sup>28</sup> I share them to provide a glimpse of the magnitude of the mission of Catholic higher education. In addition to learning about "reading, writing, and arithmetic," Catholic universities are helping men and women to become persons of character and integrity—people who contribute to the building up of the human family in truth, goodness, justice, peace, and love.

The commitment to the development of the *whole* person corresponds to the core Catholic sensibility of "finding God in all things." It is part and parcel of the mission of trustees, administrators, and faculty of Catholic institutions of higher learning. The social doctrine of the Church is caught up in the *missionary spirit* of the Church. It has a non-negotiable and prominent place in the curriculum of the Catholic university. But like all aspects of authentic formation, the educators cannot give what they do not have themselves. All of us can give only what we have. Thus, the first requisite to developing a curriculum of Catholic studies is a heart open to God and to the saving mysteries of our faith in Christ.

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<sup>27</sup> *Compendium*, n. 197.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 160.

The human person can come to a unified and organic vision of knowledge and Catholic higher education has a critical role to play in forming such a vision. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* can help in Catholic higher education's mission. I wholeheartedly recommend it for careful study. When implemented in the overall strategy of Catholic higher education, the *Compendium* can assist in the formation of individuals and communities, equipping men and women to embrace the best of what it means to be a human person through their encounter with the Living God and as disciples of Jesus Christ.

