



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



THE COMPENDIUM AS A COMPANION: STUDYING CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

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Although we say we believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church every Sunday and Holy Day, we are made up of millions of differing opinions about various other topics, especially about how we are to behave and respond to social justice issues. Some lean more towards giving unconditional assistance and support, while others say that we need to allow people to do for themselves, let them pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. The problem becomes muddled when those people have no straps or boots, for that matter.

As Catholic Christians, how do we navigate those muddy waters of how and when to give aide and assistance? As Franciscans, we are called to follow the gospel of Jesus in the manner of Saint Francis. We can then ask what would Jesus or Francis do? This is where Catholic social teaching comes in. Derived from biblical, moral and ecclesial resources, Catholic social teaching is the compass that shows us the way, especially in matters of social justice and peace.

The **Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church** was published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 2004 at the request of Pope John Paul II. It is a compilation of all the writings of the Church (until 2005) on issues of social concerns. Every Secular Franciscan should have a copy of this text in their personal library – right next to the Catechism and the Essential Documents. Unlike many other books on our shelves, this one should not have any dust collecting on it. It is a document to be pulled out frequently, studied and used. Because it is over 450 pages, it is not something you can carry around easily, but it can become a great bedside companion. And though it may start out as a cure for insomnia, you will find yourself referring to it again and again for answers in matters of justice, love and peace.

“This work also shows the value of Catholic social doctrine as an instrument of evangelization (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 54), because it places the human person and society in relationship with the light of the Gospel. The principles of the Church's social doctrine, which are based on the natural law, are then

seen to be confirmed and strengthened, in the faith of the Church, by the Gospel of Christ.” (2)

Unless you are living your life strictly as a hermit, you will always have to deal with people. You cannot get away from other children of God. As a child of God, you need to know how to live, move and have your being in relation with

others who also live, move and have their being in the world. As Secular Franciscans, we live and move in fraternities, where there are other people. Because you are a wonderful, uniquely made child of God who has thoughts and opinions, you will no doubt run into other wonderful, uniquely made children of God who have differing thoughts and opinions that just might clash with yours. This is what is known as conflict. Wherever there are people, there will be conflicts. Conflicts are normal and necessary; violence is not. How are you handling your conflicts with those other uniquely made children of God?

First, you recognize them as uniquely made children of God. If you count the number of times I have referred to my sisters and brothers as “children of God,” then let that be your first lesson. if we refer to them as children of God, they do not become enemy or object. We know how an enemy or an object is treated. The *Compendium* reminds us they are *Imago Dei*; made in the image and likeness of God. Even if they do not agree with everything we believe in, they are still made in the image and likeness of God. Even if they dress differently or smell differently, or sit in my pew at church (second row, on the end), they are still made in the image and likeness of God. The Bible, our Rule, the Catechism, our faith, the Church and the Compendium, tells us so.

May the Lord continue to grant you peace.

