

International Conference: The University and the Social Doctrine of the Church: Working Together Towards and Authentic and Integral humanism

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During the weekend of November 17-18, 2006, 176 participants from around the world gathered at the Ergife Hotel, Rome, Italy, for an international conference that sought to highlight the interdisciplinary dimension of the social doctrine of the Church. Organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the Congregation for Catholic Education, the conference intended to stimulate a "friendly" *"dialogue with various disciplines concerned with (the human person). The international gathering confirmed the teaching of the Church that (The Social Doctrine of the Church) assimilates what these disciplines have to contribute, and helps them to open themselves to a broader horizon, aimed at serving the individual person who is acknowledged and loved in the fullness of his or her vocation"* (*Centesimus Annus*, n. 59).

Cardinal Renato R. Martino, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, welcomed the participants by stating that an interdisciplinary dialogue between SDC and the sciences is possible because, as the late John Paul II's 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio* reminds us, "the human being can come to a unified and organic vision of knowledge" (*Fides et Ratio* n.85). Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, in his brief introductory intervention, dwelt on three aspects of SDC: its usefulness for teaching, its value for living, and as something to be enriched at the heart of the university.

The Holy Father's vicar for the diocese of Rome, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, focused on contemporary anthropological and social questions. Ruini framed his presentation within a "new" anthropology that has emerged from the assertion of the process of industrialization in the West, developments in biotechnology, and the contem-

porary "politico-institutional" milieu. In agreement with Benedict XVI's speech at the October 19th Verona Conference, Ruini asserts that within this "new" anthropology "a radical reduction of (the human person) has taken place." Human beings are now *"considered a simple product of nature and as such not really free, and in (him/her)self susceptible to be treated like any other animal"* (*Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants of the Fourth Ecclesiastical Convention in Verona, Italy*). Hence, SDC, in dialogue with other sciences, must emphasize that great "yes" "which God, through Jesus Christ, has said to (human beings) and to (their) life, to human love, to our freedom and our intelligence; how, therefore, faith in the God with a human face brings joy to the world" (*ibid.*).

Archbishop Józef Życiński of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland) concentrated on the interdisciplinary dimension of SDC as presented in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* and John Paul II's 1987 letter to George Coyne on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the publishing of Sir Isaac Newton's *Principia*. Życiński concluded that "no branch of knowledge is excluded from the search for the integral truth thanks to which science can purify religion from error and superstition and religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes."

The next six presentations of Friday evening and Saturday morning, after presenting the methodological principles of interdisciplinary dialogue accepted in the *Compendium*, tried to use interdisciplinary results obtained in various theological, philosophical, and scientific disciplines to determine the general context of research important for a Christian understanding of new theological and philosophical assertions and scientific discoveries.

Bishop Marcelo Sánchez, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, spoke of the relationship between SDC and philosophy. Prof. Barbara Hallensleben from the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) of that with theology. Sánchez emphasized that "philosophy shows [to SDC] the encounter space of [human beings] with the world and society, and illuminates the tension between life and death, between dreaming and waking, between normality and abnormality, between man and woman, between youth, maturity and old age, between the individual and society. And through the dialectic that shows such differences and contrasts, the decision of liberty is made possible and the commitment to action in the theoretical and practical spheres is stimulated." Prof. Hallensleben centered on the theological content of SDC, the rooting of such content in the teaching and research of a faculty of theology, the faculties of theology in the context of the university, and the link between the *loci theologici* of the university with a theology that can fruitfully contribute to the actualization of SDC in the contemporary world. Of major interest was her admonition to the Roman Catholic Church to "import" from the Russian Orthodox Church Council of Bishops of the year 2000 document's acknowledgement of the possibility to develop a conception of society from its own *ecclesiological* foundations.

The next four presentations studied the relationship between SDC and economy, socio-political sciences, law, and biological sciences. Prof. Jean-Yves Naudet of the Paul Cézanne University (Aix-en-Provence, France), basing himself on the work of Mons. Maurice Le Sage d'Hauteroche d'Hulst and Mons. Charles-Emile Freppel, deduced that economics bestows upon SDC's ethical reflection the "technical elements" indispensable to do so "with a technical competence," and at the same time, SDC gives economists "*the anthropology that must underlie their reflection and especially the ethical dimension that can clarify their technical reflection.*"

Rev. Prof. Sergio Bernal, S.J., of the Gregorian Pontifical University (Rome, Italy), warns together with Paul VI's 1971 apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, that "methodological necessity and ideological presuppositions too often lead the human sciences to isolate, in the various situations, certain aspects of (the human person),

and yet to give these an explanation which claims to be complete or at least an interpretation which is meant to be all-embracing from a purely quantitative or phenomenological point of view" (*Octogesima Adveniens* n. 38). Bernal points out that SDC, "*due to its interdisciplinary character and its openness to all sciences can help the (human sciences) have a better understanding of the human person and its world; but especially with the integrating function of its vision of man, woman and the world, SDC can lend to scientific investigation an aid that is not only useful but necessary.*"

Prof. Raymond Ranjeva of the International Court of Justice in The Hague (The Netherlands) and member of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace stated that the "concern of the Church for research on the Common Good rests for its development mainly on the work of lawyers," and that the *Compendium*, in its innovative approach, contributes to the juridical sciences by including an important "*passage on the freedom of conscience to access truth and liberty*".

Rev. Dr. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, director of education of the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia, U.S.A., in his paper "Towards 'Ordering Structures' within a Technocratic Society" beckons us to "*recognize honestly the mistakes that have been made thus far with respect to certain practices in biomedicine and bioscience.... Bolstered by the social teachings of the Church, and with the assistance of our great educational and university institutions, we stand at an opportune moment within a pluralistic society like our own to begin the interdisciplinary work that has been largely lacking over the past few decades – a dialogue to promote an ethically ordered approach and thus a profoundly balanced and positive vision for the future of biomedicine and biomedical research.*"

Mons. Horacio Zecca, rector of the Pontifical Catholic University of Santa María (Argentina) and Prof. William Lo, S.J., rector of Holy Spirit Seminary College (Hong Kong) divided their talks on the intellectual formation of their students on SDC, the integration or internal assimilation of SDC in the vocation of their priests, religious, and lay faithful in the Church, and the application of SDC to the ministry and life of their students.

Saturday afternoon what spent on a round table discussion on "The University and the Social Doctrine of the Church: Continental Experiences." Prof. Dr. Johan Verstraeten (Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium) presented the European experience; Prof. Thomas Hong-Soon Han (Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, S. Korea) set forth the Asian experience; Profs. Jonathan DeFelice, O.S.B. (St. Anselm College, Manchester, U.S.A.) and Maura Pardini Bicudo (Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo, Brasil) offered the experience of the Americas; Rev. Prof. Raphaël Tossou (Catholic University of Western Africa, Abidjan, Ivory Coast) that of Africa; and Rev. Prof. Julian McDonald (Australian Catholic University, Sydney, Australia) of Oceania.

Highlights of this roundtable exchange was the announcement of Dr. Verstraeten of the publication in 2008 of a new *Compendium of Patristic Texts on Social Ethics*; the continual work of the New Hampshire Institute of Politics at St. Anselm College; the cooperation on the *Human Dignity and Peace in Brazil Report* between the

Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo and the Christian Churches National Council of Brazil; and the collaboration between the Australian Catholic University and the Catholic Teachers College in Baucau, East Timor which saw the first cohort of primary teachers graduate since East Timor became an independent nation.

The international conference concluded with talks by Prof. Simona Beretta (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, Italy) and Prof. Dominique Greiner (Catholic University of Lille, France) on the use of the *Compendium* in universities. His Eminence Renato Cardinal Martino closed the conference by insisting, with Pope Benedict XVI, on the foundational importance of metaphysics to the anthropological question; by suggesting a future encounter with politicians on their role, with an interdisciplinary orientation, to the common good; by reaffirming the importance of the *Compendium*; and challenging all present to work for the establishment of chairs of Catholic social doctrine at their universities.