

GC 31 (1965 - 1966): Decree 32, The Social Apostolate

1. The 31st General Congregation wishes to recall to all members of the Society that the aim of the social apostolate is "to provide most men, and indeed all of them insofar as earthly conditions allow, with that abundance or at least sufficiency of goods, both temporal and spiritual, even of the natural order, that man needs lest he feel himself depressed and despised."¹ The scope of the social apostolate is broader, therefore, than the task of exercising our ministries or maintaining social works among workmen or other groups of the same sort that are especially needy. These works, indeed, according to the mind of the 28th General Congregation, decree 29, and the 30th General Congregation, decree 52, are to be promoted with great diligence, especially in those regions that are economically less developed. But the social apostolate strives directly by every endeavour to build a fuller expression of justice and charity into the structures of human life in common. Its goal in this is that every man may be able to exercise a personal sense of participation, skill, and responsibility in all areas of community life.²

From this it is clear that the social apostolate is fully in harmony with the apostolic end of the Society of Jesus accordingly, namely, to that distinctly Ignatian criterion by which we should always keep before our eyes the more universal and more enduring good. For social structures, above all today, exert an influence on the life of man, even on his moral and religious life. The "humanization" of social life is, moreover, particularly effective as a way of bearing evangelical witness in our times.

2. These things are all the more true because in our day the focal point of the social problem goes beyond the inequality between different social groups to "global" inequalities between sectors of economic life, between regions of one nation, between nations themselves or classes of nations. Again, the social problem today is also a matter of inequalities between different racial groups. And people today are not troubled only by particular questions, for example, about wages or working conditions, about family and social security. They are especially concerned with the massive worldwide problems of malnutrition, illiteracy, underemployment, overpopulation. Thus it is that social action looks more and more to the development of economic and social progress that will be truly human.

The Society of Jesus, which has its home "in every corner of the world," seems suited in a special way to entertain this universal or "catholic" vision of the social apostolate by endeavouring with all its might to see that the less developed regions of the world are helped "in deed and in truth" by the more advanced and that the whole world movement of economic progress is imbued with a Christian spirit. It can do this by contributing as well to establishing the presence of the Church in the great national and international associations and congresses that attempt to bring about such progress.

3. Since, finally, every form of the apostolate of the Society of Jesus flows from its mission "for the defense and propagation of the faith and the progress of souls in Christian life and learning," we must be very careful lest the social apostolate be reduced merely to temporal activity. This is all the more necessary because in these activities men are often affected by one-sided "ideologies" and violent passions. Never more than in our day is it necessary,

¹ Father Janssens, *Instruction on the Social Apostolate* (October 10, 1949), n.7 *Acta Romana* 11 (1949) 714.

² See John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*, *passim*.

therefore, that that "universal love which embraces in our Lord all parties, even though they are at odds with one another,"³ should shine forth among the companions of Jesus. Our men should be looking only to this, that they are trying to restore "peace on earth." a peace that is "based on truth, on justice, on love, on freedom." We are not forbidden, therefore, to undertake those things "which tend to infuse Christian principles into public life, provided that means in keeping with our Institute are employed,"⁴ in the light of the Church's teaching and with proper respect for the sacred hierarchy.⁵

4. In order that those prescriptions concerning the social apostolate already laid down in the decrees of general congregations and in the Instruction on this subject may be more effectively carried out, the 31st General Congregation earnestly recommends that:

- a) in the planning of apostolic activities, the social apostolate should take its place among those having priority;⁶
- b) in the entire course of Jesuit training, both theoretical and practical, the social dimension of our whole modern apostolate must be taken into account;
- c) members who are to be specifically destined for this apostolate should be chosen in good time; provincials should not hesitate to assign some men among them who are endowed with truly outstanding gifts both of mind and judgement and of virtue, and train them in the best universities;
- d) social centres should be promoted by provinces or regions according to a plan that will seem better suited to the concrete circumstances of each region and time; these centres should carry on research, social education, both doctrinal and practical, and also social action itself in brotherly collaboration with the laity;
- e) centres of this kind should be in close contact with one another both for the sake of information and for every kind of practical collaboration. Such collaboration should also be encouraged between centres in developed regions and those in regions which are less developed.

³ Cons [823].

⁴ Coll.Decr. 239 § 2.

⁵ See GC 28, D.29, n.16.

⁶ See GC 28, D.29, n.5.