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UN URGENT MESSAGE TO THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD: IS SDC DIFFUSION POSSIBLE ALSO AMONG NON CHRISTIANS?

It is not easy to answer this question. In fact, if we look at the term “diffusion” we see it can have two different interpretations.

The first one focuses on the subject of diffusion, irrespective of whether diffusion is welcome or not: somewhat like the guy who hands out leaflets; they end up in our hands whether we are interested or not. Or a better example: the air we breathe can be clean or polluted but breathe we must.

The second one is focused on the object, the recipient of diffusion, and introduces the concept of acceptance; think of fashion that spreads only if people like it.

The premise may seem forced, but is indispensable to better understand the subject we are going to address. If the question we are asking is whether SDC diffusion in its first sense is possible, the answer is yes: not only possible but necessary. As all Popes since Paul VI have reminded us, SDC is a formidable instrument of evangelization¹, a fundamental one.

Matters become more complicated if the question refers to diffusion in its second sense. In this case it implies a sympathetic audience, ready to listen and open to its message. This feeling is lacking where there is no Christian faith.

In this second case our attention should shift from “is it possible?” to “how is it possible?” It is quite clear that we are required to spread SDC but not as clear how we can do it effectively. In fact we should replace the term “diffusion” with “announcing” for this second term leaves the door open to acceptance by the listener. So, is it possible to announce SDC among non Christians? The reformulation will help us find an answer to this difficult question.

SDC was not born in the 19th century, with Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum Cupidine*, as somebody maintains; it was born with the creation of the first couple (Book of Genesis), because “social” means “in a relationship” (socius = companion, spouse). Nobody finds fulfillment and

¹ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church” Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004 “*The Church's social doctrine “is itself a valid instrument of evangelization” [87] and is born of the always new meeting of the Gospel message and social life. Understood in this way, this social doctrine is a distinctive way for the Church to carry out her ministry of the Word and her prophetic role. In effect, to teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message, since this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society and situates daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ the Saviour*

realization in the self. The old saying *unus homo nullus homo*, a tenet of juridical tradition, underlines this truth in a simple and concise way. It is in meeting and relating to other people that we find fulfillment and realization.

This truth is inscribed in the very nature of man. The Creator, God, is not a solitary God but a God made of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And we have been created in the image of God.

This Old Testament perspective is further amplified in Christian culture. To a Christian every relationship is marked and supported by the presence of the Other with a capital O. God is forever asking, as He asked Cain, “*where is thy brother?*” (Gen. 4, 9). In looking for the “Other” we find our own self; we come out of a solitude that is like hell, of a selfsufficiency that negates all relationships, of the misery of those who are alone because they flee from the Other. In the Other – who is Christ – we find each other and our humanity, that in Adam was lacerated. A Christian living with and for the Other is always a reflection of the light, the strength and the charity of Christ. And that charity is well articulated and made easy to understand in the principles and values of SDC.

This leads us to a central point of our discourse. The concept of relationship has always been clear even to Hellenistic and pagan cultures. In Aristotle’s *Politics* we read, for example, that man is a “political animal” and as such inclined by nature to consort with other men and form communities. The concept that we are like limbs of one body is not merely Christian but is largely shared: “*For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it*” (1Cor 1, 12 and 26.)

Cicero defines the family as *Principium urbis, quasi seminarium rei publicae*, i.e. the principle, the cell out of which tissue, organs and systems of the human body develop and come alive. Without it there is nothing but disharmony and imbalance.

Thus we see that the need to relate is fundamental: it is a condition without which any coexistence, any human development is impossible. This relationship, that we can define as imbued with solidarity, is a necessary requirement of all civilizations because it is essential to human fulfillment.

In our contemporary world this approach runs against the tenets of technological reality, by which we mean the way of looking at and relating to the world. German philosophers call it *Weltanschauung*. The problem of technology was already well understood by Paul VI and was emphasized by Benedict XVI, who warned us “*against the technocratic ideology so prevalent*

today”² that risks leaving man without orientation. And Pope Francis speaks of an “epochal change” “*which has led to new and often anonymous kinds of power.*”³

But why is this technocratic ideology so dangerous? Augusto Del Noce defines it as “*a discipline conducive to man’s mastery of a given object*” but continues “*There is thus a parallelism between technocratic progress and progress of objects. An object is more of an object to the extent it fosters more numerous and perfected techniques.... Perfectibility typical of the technocratic world is incremental perfectionism in a context of depersonalization*”⁴. Here we are at the central point: technocracy tends to depersonalize man, it makes it unable to enter into relationships.

We must not demonize it but we must acknowledge that to the extent it abandons a religious approach, i.e. it fails to recognize that Truth cannot be reached by man alone but through God, it becomes inhuman and depersonalizing.

SDC, as “*organic development of the truth of the Gospel about the dignity of the human person and his social dimension*”⁵ becomes annunciation of truth and thus a precious service to humanity which needs an outside fulcrum to go beyond itself: this fulcrum can only be the Truth. The message of SDC offers us the possibility of retrieving man’s authentic identity in a constantly changing world.

Thus the answer to the question we asked – is it possible to announce SDC among non Christians – is: yes, it is possible, simply because its message, if welcomed, helps men find their true self, makes them truly human.

At this point we could ask: and what about those who refuse the concept of truth and have a secular conception of “good”? SDC is a message that asks for an answer, not an effort to convince or a sales pitch, a search for consensus at any price. Augusto Del Noce’s answer is significant. He talks of “*answer to a challenge*”, i.e. of the dynamics which make every culture draw from its own resources to articulate effective responses to contemporary questions.⁶ It means proceeding on the basis of one’s beliefs to see which position will prove true and therefore good before history. It is not possible to convince someone who does not want to listen but this does not mean that we must cease to announce what we have seen and believed, because Truth is selfevident. I can delude myself into believing that fire makes me wet, but I will certainly change my mind the moment I get burned.

² Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 14

³ Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 52

⁴ A. Del Noce, *Il problema dell’Ateismo*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1964, 311

⁵ *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*

⁶ A. De. Noce, *Pensiero cristiano e comunismo: “inveramento” o “risposta a sfida?”*, Il Mulino (1958) 307-318