VOCATIONAL
DISCERNMENT

SECULAR INSTITUTE
LAY SERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST PRIEST

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TOPIC 3

THE COMMUNITY CHARACTER OF THE HUMAN VOCATION

METHODOLOGY

Guide to study the texts personally:

1. Read the text and underline the ideas you want to highlight or the doubts that arise. Take note of them.

2. Bring to prayer the underlined ideas that you would highlight and the doubts about the text. Explain what calls you feel God is making to you for your daily life.

3. What commitment emerges from these calls? How can you bring them to life? Where do you find resistance?

Presentation of the questions worked on to the person in charge of the formation process.

THE COMMUNITY CHARACTER OF THE HUMAN VOCATION

(Catechism of the Catholic Church)

1877. The vocation of humanity is to manifest the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father's only Son. This vocation takes on a personal form, since each one is called to enter into divine beatitude; but it also concerns the whole human community.

1. THE PERSON AND SOCIETY

I. The Community Character of the Human Vocation

1878. All men are called to the same end: God. There is a certain similarity between the union of the divine persons and the brotherhood that men and women must establish among themselves, in truth and love (cf. GS 24:3). Love of neighbor is inseparable from love of God.

1879. The human person needs social life. This is not something superadded by it, but a requirement of its nature. Through exchange with others, reciprocity of services and dialogue with his brothers and sisters, man develops his capacities; in this way it responds to his vocation (cf. GS 25:1).

1880. A society is a group of people united organically by a principle of unity that surpasses each of them. An assembly that is both visible and spiritual, a society endures overtime: it gathers the past and prepares the future. Through it, each person is constituted an "heir", receives "talents" that enrich his identity and which he must bring to fruition (cf. Lk 19:13, 15). In truth, it must be affirmed that each one has

duties towards the communities of which he is a part and is obliged to respect the authorities in charge of the common good of those communities.

1881. Each community is defined by its end and consequently obeys specific rules, but "the beginning, the subject and the end of all social institutions is and must be the human person" (GS 25:1).

1882. Some societies, such as the family and the city, correspond more immediately to the nature of man. They are necessary for him. In order to encourage the participation of the greatest number of people in social life, it is necessary to encourage the creation of associations and institutions of free initiative "for economic, social, cultural, recreational, sporting, professional and political purposes, both within individual nations and at the world level" (MM 60). This "socialization" also expresses the natural tendency that drives human beings to associate in order to achieve goals that exceed individual capacities. It develops the qualities of the person, in particular, their sense of initiative and responsibility. It helps to guarantee their rights (cf. GS 25, 2; CA 16).

1883. "Socialization also presents dangers. Too strong an intervention by the State can threaten personal freedom and initiative. The doctrine of the Church has elaborated the so-called principle of subsidiarity. According to him, "a social structure of a higher order must not interfere in the internal life of a social group of a lower order, depriving it of its competences, but rather must support it in case of need and help it to coordinate its action with that of the other social components, with a view to the common good" (CA 48; Pius XI, enc. Fortieth year).

1884. God did not want to retain for Himself alone the exercise of all powers. It gives to each creature the functions that it is capable of exercising, according to the capacities of its nature. This mode of

government must be imitated in social life. God's behavior in governing the world, which manifests so much respect for human freedom, should inspire the wisdom of those who govern human communities. They must behave as ministers of divine providence.

1885. The principle of subsidiarity is opposed to all forms of collectivism. It traces the limits of state intervention. It tries to harmonize the relationships between individuals and society. It tends to establish a true international order.

II. Conversion and society

1886. Society is indispensable for the realization of the human vocation. To attain this goal, it is necessary to respect the proper hierarchy of values which subordinates the "material and instinctive" dimensions of man's being "to the interior and spiritual ones" (CA 36):

"Human society [...] it must be considered, first of all, as a reality of a principally spiritual order: that it impels men, enlightened by the truth, to communicate among themselves the most diverse knowledge; to defend their rights and fulfill their duties; to desire the goods of the spirit; to enjoy in common the just pleasure of beauty in all its manifestations; to feel continually inclined to share with others the best of themselves; to assimilate with eagerness, for one's own benefit, the spiritual goods of one's neighbor. All these values inform and, at the same time, direct the manifestations of culture, of the economy, of social coexistence, of progress and of the political order, of the legal order and, finally, of all the elements that constitute the external expression of the human community in its incessant development" (PT 36).

1887. The reversal of means and ends (cf. CA 41), which leads to the attainment of the value of the ultimate end to that which is only a

means to an end, or to the consideration of persons as mere means to an end, engenders unjust structures that "make it difficult and practically impossible to behave in a Christian manner in conformity with the commandments of the Divine Lawgiver" (Pius XII, Radio message, June 1, 1941).

1888. It is therefore necessary to appeal to the spiritual and moral capacities of the person and to the permanent need for his interior conversion to obtain social changes that are truly at his service. The priority given to conversion of heart does not in any way eliminate but rather imposes the obligation to introduce into the institutions and conditions of life, when they lead to sin, the necessary improvements so that they conform to the norms of justice and favor the good instead of opposing it (cf. LG 36).

1889. Without the help of grace, men would not be able to "succeed in the sometimes-narrow path between the pettiness that yields to evil and the violence that, believing illusorily to combat it, aggravates it" (CA 25). It is the way of charity, that is, of love of God and neighbor. Charity represents the greatest social commandment. Respect the other and their rights. It requires the practice of justice and is the only one that makes us capable of it. It inspires a life of self-giving: "Whoever tries to save his life will lose it; and whoever loses it will keep it" (Lk 17:33)

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3. PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL LIFE

I. Authority

1897. "A well-ordered and fruitful society requires rulers, invested with legitimate authority, who defend the institutions and consecrate, to a sufficient extent, their activity and their efforts to the common benefit of the country" (PT 46).

"Authority" is the quality by virtue of which persons or institutions give laws and orders to men and expect corresponding obedience.

1898. "Every human community needs an authority to govern it (cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter). Diuturnum illud; Letter enc. Immortale Dei). This has its foundation in human nature. It is necessary for the unity of

society. Its mission is to ensure as far as possible the common good of society.

1899. The authority demanded by the moral order emanates from God: "Let all of you submit to the constituted authorities, for there is no authority that does not come from God, and those that exist have been constituted by God. Therefore whoever opposes authority rebels against the divine order, and the rebels will bring condemnation upon themselves" (Rom 13:1-2; cf. 1 Pt 2:13-17).

1900. The duty of obedience imposes on everyone the obligation to give authority the honours due to it, and to surround the persons who exercise it with respect and, according to their merit, with gratitude and benevolence.

The Church's most ancient prayer for political authority is written by St Clement of Rome (cf. 1 Tim 2:1-2):

> *"Grant them, O Lord, health, peace, harmony, stability, so that they may exercise without hindrance the sovereignty that you have given them. It is you, O Lord, heavenly King of the ages, who give to the children of men glory, honor, and power over the things of the earth. O Lord, direct your counsel according to what is good, according to what is pleasing in your eyes, so that by exercising with piety, in peace and meekness, the power which you have given them, they may find you propitious" (St. Clement of Rome, Epistle ad Corinthios, 61, 1-2).*

1901. Although authority responds to an order fixed by God, "the determination of the regime and the appointment of rulers must be left to the free will of the citizens" (GS 74, 3).

The diversity of political regimes is morally permissible as long as they promote the legitimate good of the community that adopts them. Regimes whose nature is contrary to natural law, public order and the fundamental rights of individuals cannot achieve the common good of the nations on which they have been imposed.

1902. Authority does not derive its moral legitimacy from itself. He must not behave in a despotic manner, but act for the common good as a "moral force, based on freedom and awareness of the task and obligations he has received" (GS 74:2).

> *"Human legislation only has the character of the law when it conforms to just reason, which means that its obligatory nature proceeds from the eternal law. To the extent that it departs from reason, it would be necessary to declare it unjust, since it would not verify the notion of law; it would rather be a form of violence" (St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, 1-2, q. 93, a. 3 ad 2).*

1903. Authority is legitimately exercised only if it seeks the common good of the group in question and if, in order to achieve it, it employs morally licit means. If the leaders proclaim unjust laws or take measures contrary to the moral order, these provisions cannot bind in conscience. "In such a situation, one's own authority completely crumbles and a frightful iniquity arises" (PT 51).

1904. "It is preferable that a power be balanced by other powers and other spheres of competence that keep it within its proper limits. This is the principle of the 'rule of law' in which the law is sovereign and not the arbitrary will of men" (CA 44)

II. The common good

1905. According to the social nature of man, the good of each person is necessarily related to the common good. This can only be defined with reference to the human person:

> *"Do not live in isolation, closed in on yourselves, as if you were already justified, but come together to seek together what constitutes the common interest" (Epistula Pseudo Barnabae, 4, 10).*

1906. By the common good, we must understand "the totality of those conditions of social life which enable groups and each of their members to achieve their own perfection more fully and easily" (GS 26:1; cf. GS 74:1). The common good affects everyone's life. It requires prudence on the part of each one, and even more so on the part of those who exercise authority. It has three essential elements:

1907. It presupposes, in the first place, respect for the person as such. In the name of the common good, the authorities are obliged to respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person. Society must enable each of its members to realize his or her vocation. In particular, the common good resides in the conditions for the exercise of natural freedoms that are indispensable for the development of the human vocation: "the right to act in accordance with the right norm of one's conscience, to the protection of private life and to just freedom, even in religious matters" (cf. GS 26, 2).

1908. Secondly, the common good requires social welfare and the development of the group itself. Development is the summary of all social duties. Certainly it is up to the authority to decide, in the name of the common good, between the various particular interests; but it must provide each person with what he or she needs to lead a truly human

life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, adequate information, the right to found a family, etc. (cf. GS 26:2).

1909. Finally, the common good implies peace, that is, the stability and security of a just order. It presupposes, therefore, that the authority ensures, by honest means, the security of society and that of its members. The common good is the basis of the right to individual and collective self-defense.

1910. If every human community possesses a common good that shapes it as such, the most complete realization of this common good takes place in the political community. It is the responsibility of the State to defend and promote the common good of civil society, citizens and intermediate institutions.

1911. Human interdependencies intensify. They spread little by little to the whole earth. The unity of the human family, which brings together beings who possess the same natural dignity, implies a universal common good. This requires an organization of the community of nations capable of "providing for the different needs of men, both in the fields of social life, to which food, health, education belong [...], and in not a few particular situations that may arise in some places, such as [...] to help refugees scattered throughout the world in their suffering, or to help migrants and their families" (GS 84:2).

1912. The common good is always oriented towards the progress of persons: "The social order and its progress must be subordinated to the good of persons and not to the other way around" (GS 26:3). This order is based on truth, it is built on justice, it is enlivened by love.

III. Responsibility and participation

1913. Participation is the voluntary and generous commitment of the person in social exchanges. It is necessary that everyone participate, each according to the place he occupies and the role he plays, in promoting the common good. This duty is inherent in the dignity of the human person.

1914. Participation is achieved first through dedication to the tasks for which personal responsibility is assumed: by the attention paid to the education of his family, by the responsibility in his work, man participates in the good of others and of society (cf. CA 43).

1915. Citizens should take an active part in public life as much as possible. The modalities of this participation may vary from country to country or from culture to culture. "The conduct of nations in which the greatest possible part of the citizens participate with true freedom in public life is to be praised" (GS 31).

1916. The participation of all in the promotion of the common good implies, like every ethical duty, an ever-renewed conversion of the members of society. Fraud and other subterfuges by which some escape the obligation of the law, and the prescriptions of social duty must be firmly condemned as incompatible with the demands of justice. It is necessary to take care of the development of institutions that improve the conditions of human life (cf. GS 30).

1917. It is up to those who exercise authority to reaffirm the values that engender confidence in the members of the group and encourage them to put themselves at the service of their fellow men. Participation begins with education and culture. "We can rightly think that the future fate of humanity lies in the hands of those who are able to pass on to succeeding generations reasons to live and to hope" (GS 31).